

READERS' CHOICE YOUR TOP TRIPS IN EVERY REGION

# BACKPACKER

THE OUTDOORS AT YOUR DOORSTEP

## THE HIKER'S LIFE LIST

101 PLACES TO GO, SKILLS TO LEARN & THINGS TO DO BEFORE YOU DIE



10 THINGS YOU SHOULD NEVER DO

HALL OF FAME GEAR

OUR PICKS IN EVERY CATEGORY

NEVER GET LOST  
KEY MAP SKILLS

GO SOLO  
A PRO'S TIPS AND TRICKS

TOUGH GEAR  
LIGHT TO LUXE





WHATEVER THE WEATHER  
**EXPERIENCE  
THE DIFFERENCE**

  
**David Lama**  
Extreme Mountaineer

**MAMMUT**



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**Cover** Hardergrat, Switzerland, by PatitucciPhoto. Hike it: page 30.

Get videos, slide-shows, and more in our iPad edition: [backpacker.com/ipad](http://backpacker.com/ipad).

04 #trailchat  
Cheryl Strayed on the new movie *Wild*

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# #trailchat

YOUR OPINIONS, PHOTOS, AND FEATS



## PCT MVP

**Thru-hiking hits the big screen this month with the release of *Wild*, the adaptation of Cheryl Strayed's bestselling memoir. We caught up with the author after the movie's film festival debut. By Peter Flax**

**BACKPACKER** What was it like the first time you saw the movie?

**CHERYL STRAYED** Despite being part of the process from the beginning—I weighed in on the script significantly, I was on the set—when it came time to see that first cut, it was a moving experience, a shocking experience. There's no getting over the strangeness of watching parts of your life being reenacted on the screen.

**BP** How involved were you in trying to nail the authenticity of the movie?

**CS** Obviously, there were conversations I

had with Reese [Witherspoon] and Laura [Dern] about me and my mom, the real people they were playing. But I think my presence was the most helpful on the set when it came to the backpacking details. I mean, none of these people who made the film are backpackers—not [screenwriter] Nick Hornby, not [director] Jean-Marc Vallée, not Reese.

**BP** Even though you're the inexperienced one in the story?

**CS** With backpacking, like many things in life, you only go from beginner to expert after you experience certain moments. You don't know the consequences of bringing too much stuff until you're walking under the weight of that pack. Reese does this beautiful job of paying attention to those details that I shared in the book about how I prepared as much as I could and then the trail taught me everything

else. You see her over the course of the film go from sort of comically naïve to being in command of what she's doing.

**BP** Did you feel you were comically naïve when you started your thru-hike?

**CS** Yes and no. I did a lot of hiking. I was an avid dayhiker before my trip. And in other ways I was really prepared, like before I went, I packed all those boxes of food and mailed them to myself along the trail. But backpacking is different than dayhiking, and I absolutely made a lot of comic mistakes. I took too much stuff and I put the wrong gas in my stove.

**BP** In the film, which scene best captures your experience?

**CS** One of my favorite scenes is that first morning when I packed my pack in the motel. It's just like how it was in life. I laughed so hard watching that because it's so perfectly acted by Reese. I love that moment where she topples and rolls over; she's just flattened by the pack, lying there on the floor crushed beneath its weight. Of course this scene is comical, but it's also what the movie and the book are about: how we bear the unbearable. I know I felt that I couldn't bear the world without my mother, and then there I was with this backpack that I couldn't bear. Trying to figure that out wound up being the whole point of the journey.

**BP** What was your reaction to the way wilderness is portrayed in the movie?

**CS** That was important to me. While we were out shooting, I would say to Reese, "Always remember that even on my hardest days, the days that I was the most miserable on the trail, there were

Continued on page 6 ➤

## Backtracking

**✉** We estimated the cost of tackling British Columbia's West Coast Trail ("Proving Grounds," August 2014) at \$95, but Chris Dyas informs us that it's actually closer to \$180 once you factor in reservation fees, ferries, and taxes. "And that's not counting the optional \$20 hamburger and \$9 tall boy halfway through [at the Nitinat Narrows ferry dock]. Still an epic trip, though."

## Overheard

**✉** "I was excited to see that you reviewed backpacking underwear [page 48, October 2014]," Amanda Childs writes. "UNTIL I flipped to it and saw four pairs of male underwear and one pair of female underwear. I noticed you made sure the women's pair was lacy. Were you thinking

that was a priority for me?"

Gear Editor Kristin Hostetter responds: *The ExOfficio undies got our nod because they're affordable, quick-drying, and itch-free (the lace is a bonus!). Next time, we'll be sure to include more options for women.*

**“To promote melting bottles to make art in the back-country is idiotic...”**

**✉** "The Complete Guide to Fire" [October 2014] incensed Appalachian Trail maintainer Robert Collins. "Hikers are NOT going to pack out broken glass or unbroken bottles covered in soot."

Editor's note: *BACKPACKER* readers always pack out their trash, right?

THAT WAS 18.4%

SICKER THAN THE

LAST TIME;

I WOULD'VE SAID 10%,

BUT WHO AM I TO

ARGUE WITH THE DATA?

HEART RATE  
142 bpm

SPEED  
38 mph

ELEVATION  
8767 ft



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# #trailchat



Cheryl Strayed on the PCT in 1995.

several times throughout the day that I would stop and look around and I would just feel so lucky to be there." Even if I was grumpy about being there, it was the indisputable beauty of the wilderness that in so many ways kept me inspired.

**BP** You mentioned that the people involved with the project were not hikers or backpackers. Do you think any of them came around during this process?

**CS** I think so [laughs]. The night before *Wild* had its world premiere at the Telluride Film Festival [in August], we all had dinner and I said, "You guys, we got to start this day out right, so let's go hiking." So many people on the *Wild* team—Reese, Jean Marc, Laura, and executives like David Greenbaum and Nathan Ross—got up the morning of that premiere and went for a hike.

**BP** How have the book and movie affected your own hiking?

**CS** I am so unbelievably busy—time to myself, time to hike has been a challenge. But whatever city I'm traveling to, I at least find a good spot to hike. But it's funny: These last couple years I've been traveling so much and talking about this story, it's the least fit I've ever been. I'm traveling, eating hotel room service and airport food, and hardly getting to exercise. But that's how it is and I'm finding my way back. Next summer I'd like to go on a backpacking trip with my family and just get away from it all.

**BP** Where would you want to go?

**CS** Oh god. There are so many places near and far, but I have to say, I'd love to go to New Zealand.

#96 on our life list: see page 67.

## Campfire Cinema

Eleven outdoor movies our readers love. See more at [backpacker.com/BPCinema](http://backpacker.com/BPCinema).

Guilty pleasure	Realistic	Far-fetched	WTF?
<b>THE EDGE</b> (1997) Alec Baldwin and Anthony Hopkins battle a grizzly and each other in this pulpy-yet-gripping thriller.	<b>A RIVER RUNS THROUGH IT</b> (1992) Spectacular Montana scenery and a young Brad Pitt provide eye candy galore.	<b>180° SOUTH</b> (2010) If this modern-day retracing of Doug Tompkins and Yvon Chouinard's 1968 journey to Patagonia doesn't inspire you, better check your pulse.	<b>TOUCHING THE VOID</b> (2003) Only the greatest mountaineering documentary of all time
<b>THE GREY</b> (2011) Liam Neeson is as badass as ever, but his blood-thirsty wolf foes are a little over-the-top.	<b>THE WAY</b> (2010) Martin Sheen finds solace on Spain's 900-mile Camino de Santiago (see page 26). Watch it with family—and plenty of tissues.	<b>THE LORD OF THE RINGS TRILOGY</b> (2001-03) Sam and Frodo thru-hike Middle Earth with the fate of mankind at stake.	<b>INTO THE WILD</b> (2007) Eddie Vedder's masterful soundtrack highlights this well-crafted adaptation of Jon Krakauer's classic.
<b>DELIVERANCE</b> (1972) May invoke an irrational fear of banjos.	<b>JEREMIAH JOHNSON</b> (1972) Robert Redford = quintessential mountain man	<b>127 HOURS</b> (2010) James Franco shines as Aron Ralston, a hiker who went to desperate lengths to survive in a Utah slot canyon.	<b>INTO THE WILD</b> A movie about a movie about a movie.

## Art Imitates Life

If you want to make a film about a PCT adventure set in 1995 that won't make backpacking enthusiasts cringe, you'd better get the details right. Here's how the filmmakers managed the task.

### The Gear



Danner re-created Strayed's old kicks, the Mountain Light Cascade (and lest the movie inspires some retro hiking, the model is available to consumers as well). Gregory provided an original sample of the pack that Strayed dubbed "Monster." A vintage MSR WhisperLite stove, a North Face tent, and a period-authentic

Sierra Designs sleeping bag were curated from collectors and Craigslist.

### The Locations

Other than one day of shooting in California, all filming took place in Oregon, and very few of the scenes were shot on the PCT. Crews used more than 70 locations to simulate the varied elevations and vegetation zones.

### The Flora

The film crew transported Joshua trees from Nevada to Oregon to re-create desert scenes. They also brought in foxtails, Jeffrey pines, cacti, and various chaparral species to make different environmental zones look realistic.

### The Props

The Pacific Crest Trail Association\* provided real, mid-1990s trail markers and the film

crew purchased additional signage from the same vendor as the U.S. Forest Service.

### The Light

Nighttime scenes were lit by candles instead of floodlights, and the film doesn't show any campfires in areas where they would have been banned at the time.

### The Pack



After watching Witherspoon carry a pack that looked full but not heavy, Strayed suggested using a genuinely heavy load. The weighed-down Monster approached 60 pounds, and viewers can see Witherspoon laboring with real effort. —P.F.

\*This nonprofit is dedicated to protecting and maintaining the PCT. Learn more at [pcta.org](http://pcta.org).

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\*Terms & Conditions Apply.

# GO BIG

The ultimate hiking life begins with a decision: Commit to the quest. Then start with these 33 ideas that will feed your passion, reward your effort, and inspire you to explore.

no.

01

*Walk through  
a rhododendron  
tunnel.*

These real-life enchanted forests are sure to inspire tingly awe. Rhododendrons in the eastern United States typically bloom the first three weeks of June; catch them just afterwards, says photographer Sharon Canter, and you'll get the "tunnel effect," as spent petals line the ground. See the phenomenon on the .7-mile Craggy Pinnacle Trail off the Blue Ridge Parkway and, pictured here, the 1-mile Grassy Ridge Trail on the North Carolina-Tennessee border. Access this rhododendron tunnel on a spur off the Appalachian Trail, starting from Carvers Gap. INFO [bit.do/GrassyRidgeTrl](http://bit.do/GrassyRidgeTrl)

TEXT BY MAREN HORJUS







NO.  
**02**  
*Hike the  
Grand  
Canyon's  
North Rim.*

Don't get us wrong—we love an epic Rim-to-Rim tour of the Big Ditch as much as the next hiker. But here's a secret: You can reach the best (private!) views via an easy walk on the North Rim. The longer drive and shortened season (road access is closed late fall through spring) keep the masses away, so a mellow 3.5-mile out-and-back scores you this vista of Wotans Throne.

Follow the Walhalla Glades Trail across the Walhalla Plateau via a no-longer-in-use Jeep road to Cape Royal. For more Grand Canyon ideas, flip to page 36, or check out our comprehensive guide at [backpacker.com/grandcanyonguide](http://backpacker.com/grandcanyonguide). INFO [nps.gov/grca](http://nps.gov/grca)



no.  
**03**  
*Camp in  
this spot.*

Sure, you should climb Mt. Rainier some day, and circle it on the Wonderland Trail as well, but for the ultimate view of Rainier, we prefer this quiet site in the Tatoosh Range. Getting there is half the fun: Start at Reflection Lakes and hike 1.7 miles to the end of the trail at Pinnacle Peak. Then venture deeper into the backcountry on an unofficial (but clearly established) path that traverses the mountain chain east and south. In about a mile, nab this bucket list site—past 6,460-foot The Castle but before 6,971-foot Unicorn Peak. The handful of sites in the Tatoosh are first-come, first-serve, but you need to grab a free backcountry permit from the Longmire Ranger Station on the way to heaven. Aim for late August when the purple-and-blue lupine and pink heather are in bloom. INFO [nps.gov/mora](http://nps.gov/mora)





No. 04: SUMMIT YOUR STATE'S HIGH POINT. ►►



no.  
**05**

*Learn  
wilderness  
first aid.*

# On My List



"I just returned from a trip I'd been dreaming about since 1996: a full-length traverse of the Cordillera Blanca, the jewel of the Peruvian Andes. It ended up being 240 miles—up and over 23 passes. Finally checking that trip off my list reminds me of another that's long overdue: hiking the Kimberley region back home in Australia."

—CAM "SWAMI" HONAN  
MOST TRAVELED HIKER ON EARTH (50,000 MILES AND COUNTING); GET HIS TOP TIPS AT BACKPACKER.COM/HONAN.

016



Colorado's Mt. of the Holy Cross

## NO. 06: Bag a Fourteener.

→More than 200 routes. A million feet in elevation. Sixty-seven towering peaks. Every hiker should conquer at least one of the Lower 48's 14,000-footers—and Mt. of the Holy Cross gets our nod as the quintessential pick. ¶ As the story goes, 19th-century journalist Samuel Bowles pinpointed the mountain adorned with a cross-shaped snowfield on its northeast face and declared, "It is as if God has set His sign, His seal, His promise there—a beacon upon the very center and height of the Continent to all its people and all its generations..." We agree: For scenery, convenience, solitude, and overall tough-but-beginner-friendly nature, Mt. of the Holy Cross deserves to be on your list. Access the 14,009-footer on a 6-mile climb via the standard North Ridge route south of Vail to earn wraparound views of the Rockies and a bird's-eye vantage over the Bowl of Tears, a cerulean pool that drains the cross and surrounding slopes. It's a Fourteener, so expect company, but it isn't a hiker highway like some of the more popular (and accessible) peaks. **Overnight option:** Camp at one of a handful of established sites near East Cross Creek around the midpoint. **Starting elevation** 10,300 feet **Distance** 12 miles round-trip **Trailhead** Half Moon (39.500531, -106.432972; 115 miles west of Denver) on Notch Mountain Road/FS 707

## NO. 07 GET A SCAR.

→It's an unfair relationship. No matter how hard I try to leave no trace in the wilderness, the wilderness leaves its trace on me. But I'm not

complaining. My scars are the closest things I have to souvenirs. My right pinky memorializes my first-ever backpacking trip: Tip-toeing to the lake on blistered feet, I slipped and hand-planted on a splintered log. One finger over, you can see the permanent evidence that, somewhere down the line, I didn't

find the closing mechanism of a certain pocketknife very intuitive. Other scars commemorate moments of glory: A harrowing summit bid that involved an unintentional glissade decorates my left leg, and my right shin shows what's left of the infamous poison oak-infested midcut sock that found its way back

on my foot for a 14-hour ski tour.

It's not that I go looking for pain, but the outdoors invites injury: Sticks are pointy, rocks are sharp, mud is slippery. The wilderness is unpredictable. Embrace that. Because, in the end, wounds heal—and then you'll have the most permanent keepsake there is.

—Maren Horjus

no.  
**08**

*Have a snowball fight in summer.*

# No. 09: Cook with wild berries.

Look for these easy-to-ID berries: blue, rasp, elder, cran, black, and service. ▶ All aggregate-style berries (picture a raspberry) are edible. ▶ Scan ground level for productive bushes. They're most common on the edges of meadows. ▶ Most berries ripen in late summer. ▶ Don't eat it unless you can positively ID it.

## Make a compote.



What's better than fresh berries? Piping hot fresh berries. On everything.

**2** cups berries  
**½** cup water  
**3** Tbsp sugar  
**1** Tbsp cornstarch  
**1** pinch nutmeg

**AT HOME** → Blend dry ingredients in a baggie. **IN CAMP** → Combine berries, water, and cornstarch mixture in pot over medium heat. Stir constantly until it boils; it should be a batter-like consistency. Remove from heat and serve over chocolate squares, with toasted nuts, or by itself (a splash of brandy wouldn't hurt).



## Relieve an upset stomach.

Steep a handful of edible berry leaves and roots in boiling water—the pleasant-tasting tea can ease a stomachache or GI issues. Forage for more medicinal plants in your backwoods pharmacy with this guide: [backpacker.com/medplants](http://backpacker.com/medplants).

## Make a backcountry pie.



"Warm, aromatic, and very juicy, these pies are how I celebrate my foraging efforts," says our Trail Chef Jennifer Bowen. **2 servings**

**2** 10-inch flour tortillas  
**1½** cups berries  
**2** Tbsp jam (flavor of your choice)  
**3** Tbsp canola oil  
**3** Tbsp powdered sugar  
**1** pinch nutmeg  
**1** pinch ground cardamom

**AT HOME** → Pack jam and oil in small containers and powdered sugar and spices in a single quart-size zip-top bag.

**IN CAMP** → Heat oil over medium flame. While it's heating, spoon half of the jam in the center of each tortilla. Add half the berries to each and roll into burritos. When the oil is sizzling, gently place the hand pies in the pan, fold facing down. Flip once to get each side golden brown. Remove, place in sugar bag, and shake to coat.



## NO.10 POOP IN THE WOODS.

It's the most natural thing in the world. Don't let a lack of indoor plumbing prevent you from camping overnight.



### The Squat

The original outdoor pooping stance: Dig a hole (6 inches deep, 200 feet from water, camp, and trails) and squat. You may want to hold your knees for support.



### The Tree Hug

It's not just for hippies: Dig your hole a foot away from the base of a tree, then hold the trunk for support. Whatever you do, don't let go.



### The Butt Hang

A boulder or fallen log can double as a toilet seat.

Visit [Int.org/learn/principle-3](http://Int.org/learn/principle-3) to learn about waste disposal.

NO. 11

# Go Ultralight.

Cut pack weight in half with nine proven winners.



#### A Therm-a-Rest NeoAir XLite S

The 2.5-inch thick, tapered XLite cushions and insulates against cold, rough rock—and weighs less than a sandwich. \$130; 8 oz.; [thermarest.com](http://thermarest.com)

#### B Sea to Summit Escapist

No more wet, cold, midnight adjustments: Tweak this tarp's guyouts from inside. It sleeps up to three. \$199; 12 oz.; [seatosummit.com](http://seatosummit.com)

#### C MontBell EX Light

**Doesewn Anorak**  
Ridiculously light and packable (to grapefruit size), this hooded pullover packs maximum warmth for weight. \$219; 6.2 oz.; [montbell.us](http://montbell.us)

#### D Snow Peak Titanium Short Spork

It'll last forever if you don't lose it. \$9; .5 oz.; [snowpeak.com](http://snowpeak.com)

#### E Evernew Ti Pasta Pot 700ml

The tall, coffee-can shape means this titanium pot sits firmly on tiny burners. The spout and strainer holes are gravy. \$60; 3.4 oz.; [evernewamerica.com](http://evernewamerica.com)

#### F MSR Pocket Rocket

This tiny canister stove is a proven winner, with sub-four minute boil times. \$40; 3 oz.; [cascadedesigns.com/msr](http://cascadedesigns.com/msr)

#### G Marmot Essence Jacket

It's breathable, protective,

affordable, and light thanks to a NanoPro 2.5-layer membrane and a minimalist design that trims off everything nonessential. \$200; 5.8 oz.; [marmot.com](http://marmot.com)

#### H Marmot Plasma 15

Deceptively warm for its crazy-low weight, the Plasma uses premium 875+ fill goose down stuffed into vertical baffles and a surprisingly durable 10-denier Pertex Quantum fabric. \$539; 2 lbs.; [marmot.com](http://marmot.com)

#### I ZPacks Arc Blast 52

The curved, carbon-fiber frame supports 35-pound loads and provides airflow against the back, while keeping weight low. \$279; 1 lb. 1 oz.; [zpacks.com](http://zpacks.com)

## #12: VOLUNTEER FOR TRAIL WORK

Admit it: You're having *fun*. Moving dirt, swinging an axe, trimming brush—it's all just so *satisfying*. The progress is immediate and tangible. The cause is unimpeachable. And you go home with more than sore muscles. Every trail is a gift of sweat and attention that smoothes the way into the wild, so stamp your name on one. Find an opportunity near you at [americanhiking.org/volunteer-vacations](http://americanhiking.org/volunteer-vacations). —Rachel Zurer

NO. 13



# Go Ultraluxe.

Enjoy decadent comfort—on the trail and in camp.



**A** Goal Zero Lighthouse

250

Illuminate your campsite and recharge your gadgets all at the same time. **\$80**; 1 lb. 4 oz.; [goalzero.com](http://goalzero.com)

**B** NEMO Cosmo Insulated Pad with Pillowtop

Pack the two pieces together for a super-plush system, or streamline your load by ditching the Pillowtop. Either way, you'll sleep well atop the insulated pad that inflates via an integrated foot pump. Pad: **\$160**; 2 lbs. 4 oz. Pillowtop: **\$90**; 1 lb. 8 oz.; [nemo-equipment.com](http://nemo-equipment.com)

**C** NEMO Strato Loft 25

The Strato does it right with a rectangular shape, a snuggly blanket

flap around the neck, and double zippers that let you to sit up without bringing the pad with you. **\$370**; 3 lbs. 4 oz.; [nemoequipment.com](http://nemoequipment.com)

**D** Mystery Ranch Terraplane

This 85-liter behemoth can manage loads up to 75 pounds with a robust, super-padded suspension system and burly 500-denier Cordura. **\$485**; 7 lbs. 7 oz.; [mysteryranch.com](http://mysteryranch.com)

**E** Mountain Hardwear Optic 3.5

Two huge adjacent mesh doors offer up grandiose views without sacrificing protection from the elements. You also get castle-like interior space (for three). **\$285**; 6 lbs.

11 oz.; [mountainhardwear.com](http://mountainhardwear.com)

**F** Helinox Chair One

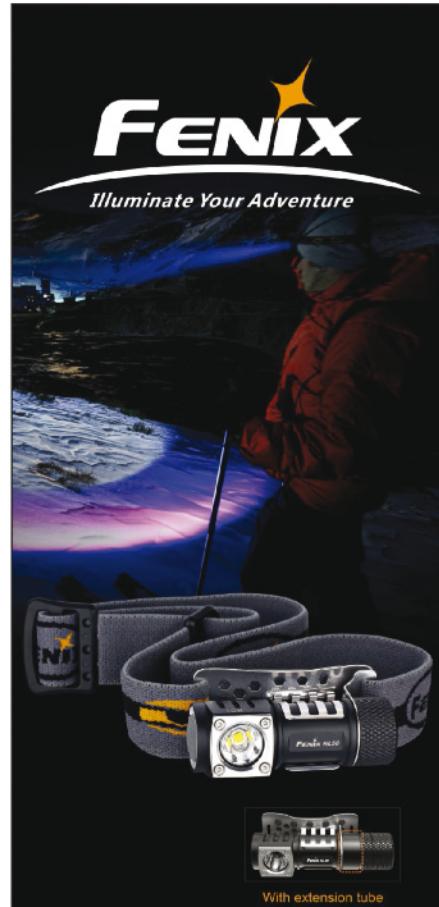
It packs down to the size of a 2-liter bottle. **\$100**; 1 lb. 14 oz.; [bigagnes.com](http://bigagnes.com)

**G** GSI Outdoors Gourmet Kitchen Set 11

This kit comes complete with cutting board, utensils, and tiny containers for carrying your gourmet ingredients. **\$40**; 1 lb. 1 oz.; [gsioutdoors.com](http://gsioutdoors.com)

**H** Outdoor Research Floodlight

Thanks to 800-fill down and seam-taped Pertex Shield+ shell fabric, this toaster is as warm as it is weatherproof. **\$395**; 1 lb. 3 oz.; [outdoorresearch.com](http://outdoorresearch.com)



## HL50

Max **365** Lumens

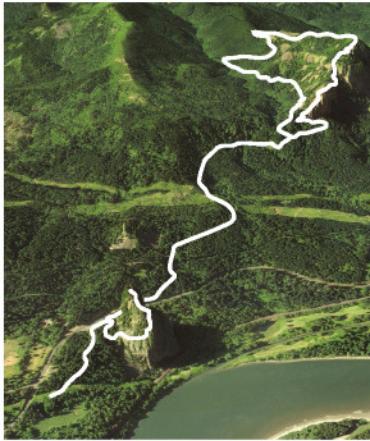
**WATERPROOF:** IPX-8, underwater 2m

**SIZE:** 2.51inch (L) x 1.26inch (W) x 1.18inch (H)

**WEIGHT:** 1.83oz weight (excluding battery)

## POWER SOURCE FLEXIBILITY

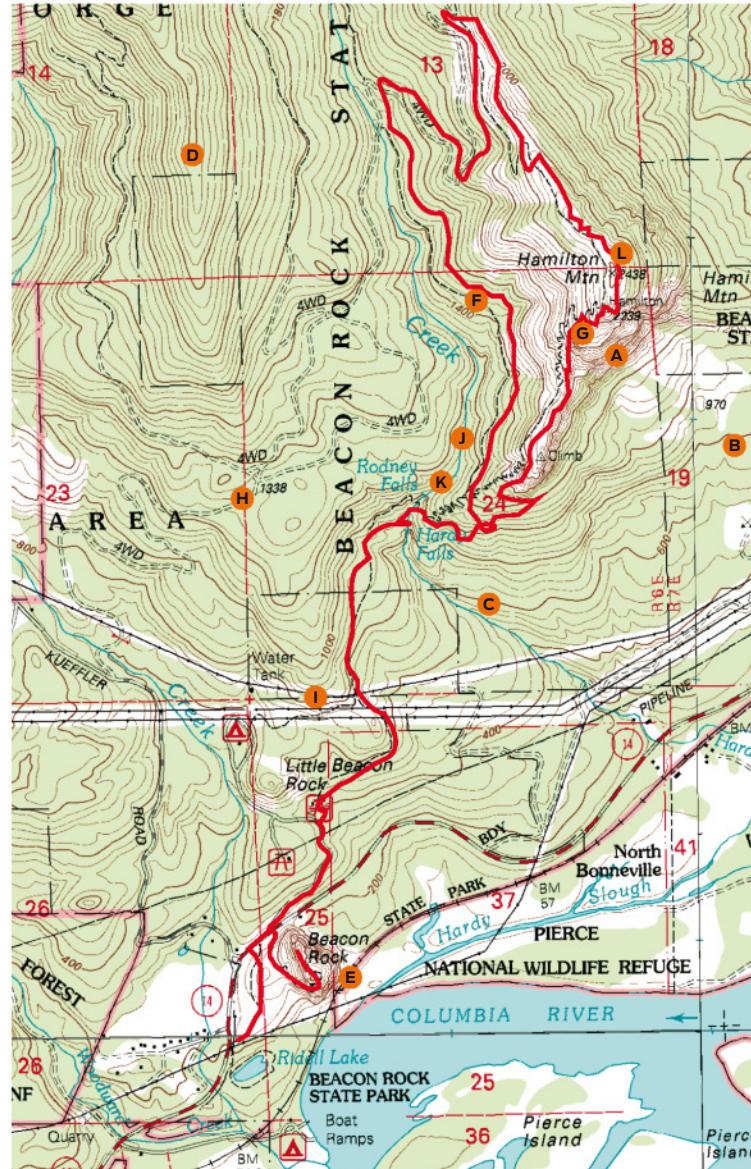
- ★ 365-lumen burst mode
- ★ Two battery options (CR123A or AA battery)
- ★ Neutral white output
- ★ Detachable mini flashlight



#15

## Read a topo.

**Contour Lines** Each thin, brown line represents a single elevation. Check the bottom corner of your map for the contour interval, which tells you how many vertical feet apart they are from one another (usually 40 feet). Thicker lines, or “index lines,” are labeled with the elevation in feet. **A.** **Steep terrain** Crowded sections of contour lines **B.** **Gradual terrain** Spacious sections of contour lines **C.** **Gully** V-shaped contour lines “point” toward higher elevations. **D.** **Ridge** V-shaped contour lines “point” to lower elevations. **E.** **Cliff** Super-concentrated lines **F.** **Trail** Black, dashed line **G.** **Switchbacks** Zigzagging trail **H.** **Dirt road** Black, dashed double-line **I.** **Railroad tracks** Solid black line with hatch marks **J.** **Stream** Solid blue line **K.** **Waterfall** Single blue hatch intersecting a stream **L.** **Summit** Contour line forms a small circle.



**NO.**  
**16**  
**DO IT**  
**IN THE**  
**WOODS.**

**YES! YES!**  
**OH GOD, YES!**  
► Pack a pad, fleece, or puffy. ► Inspect for poison oak and poison ivy vines. ► Use condoms—no mess on your bag. ► Bring baby wipes and a zip-top bag. It's the LNT way.

**NO, NO,**  
**DEAR LORD, NO!**  
► Use scents. You don't want to attract critters. ► Time it for dawn or dusk—mosquitoes have no tact. ► Spread your blanket on a red ant colony. ► Hook up in a hut if you're not alone.

**READERS'**  
**CHOICE**

**NOs. 17-19**  
**On Your List** ► *Traverse*

**Isle Royale National Park, Michigan** —Kelly Morrissey, Holland, MI

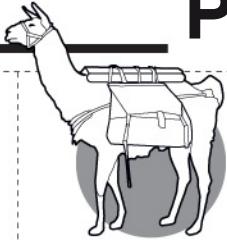
► *Check off any section of the Appalachian Trail* “There's so much more to the trail than the views. It's about the towns and the people and the camaraderie.” —Maria Wishart, Rotterdam, NY ► *Hike the Rockwall Trail, Kootenay National Park, British Columbia* —Becky Rutheford, Missoula, MT

# GO PACKING.

# 20



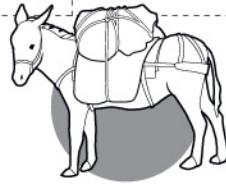
**DOG**  
Capacity 8-20 pounds  
Speed Your pace (2-4 mph)  
Attitude **Generally spectacular**  
Costs One-time investment for doggie pack (\$50-\$150) + roughly 12 years of subsequent TLC (you can't turn him back in after the trip)



**LLAMA**  
Capacity **80-100 pounds**  
Speed 1-2 mph  
Attitude Laid-back and aloof  
Costs \$65/day (self-guided) + \$100 orientation + \$1.25/mile truck and stock rack rental; \$300-\$400/day (guided, per Buckhorn Llama Company; [llamapack.com](http://llamapack.com))



**GOAT**  
Capacity 25-50 pounds  
Speed 3 mph  
Attitude Stubborn, but **once they adopt you into their herd, you're in.**  
Costs \$30/day/goat + \$30 health certificate + \$50 trailer rental (per High Uinta Pack Goats; [highuintapack-goats.com](http://highuintapack-goats.com))



**MULE**  
Capacity **Up to 150 pounds!**  
Speed 3.5 mph  
Attitude Friendly (and compliant) if treated well; stubborn if not  
Costs \$240/day (self-guided); \$120/mule/day + \$350/guide/day (guided, per Rock Creek Pack Station; [rockcreekpackstation.com](http://rockcreekpackstation.com))



**PARTNER**  
Capacity 10 pounds (of your load); more if he's really ignorant  
Speed 2 mph  
Attitude Agreeable if well-treated, but prone to complaining  
**Cost Free!** Or maybe a share of the six-pack he's unknowingly schlepping.



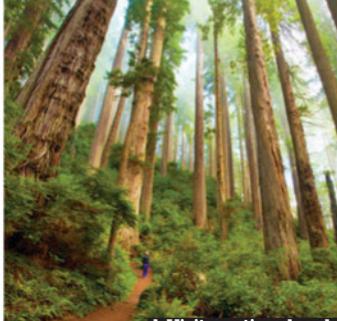
a. See fall foliage.



b. Catch the sunrise or sunset.



c. Do an overnight.



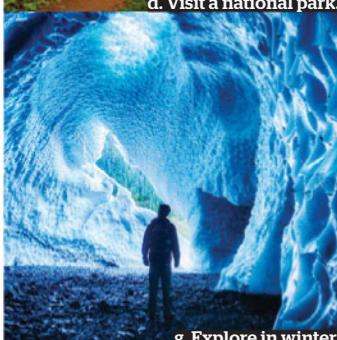
d. Visit a national park.



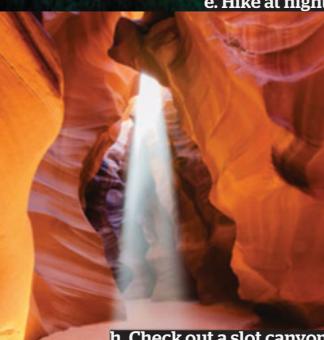
e. Hike at night.



f. Go peakbagging.



g. Explore in winter.



h. Check out a slot canyon.



i. Find a swimming hole.

## #21 SHARE A



### MEMORY.

A life list takes, well, a lifetime. Check off these nine exploits in a single year, however, and you'll be on the right track. Tag photo evidence **#BPMag** and **@backpackermag** for a chance to be featured.

a. Sommerville Community Path, MA, by Stephen Walasavage  
[@walasavagephoto](http://walasavagephoto)

b. Starr Mountain, TN, by Mason Boring  
[@masonboring](http://masonboring)

c. Triangulation Peak, OR, by Kelly Marchant  
[@kellymarchant](http://kellymarchant)

d. Redwood National Park, CA, by Eric Hanson  
[@ericjhanson](http://ericjhanson)

e. Graveyard Fields, NC, by Spencer Black  
[@spencerkblack](http://spencerkblack)

f. Mt. Sneffels, CO, by Lauren Rouse  
[@larnrouse](http://larnrouse)

g. Granite Falls, WA, by Michael Matti  
[@michaelmatti](http://michaelmatti)

h. Antelope Canyon, AZ, by Crystal Brindle  
[@crystalann\\_b](http://crystalann_b)

i. Ingalls Lake, WA, by Jeff Carlson  
[@jeffreymichaelcarlson](http://jeffreymichaelcarlson)



#22  
Sleep  
under  
the  
stars...  
#23  
...in a  
hammock.

Swing in style: Learn  
more about hammock  
camping at [backpacker  
.com/hammock](http://backpacker.com/hammock).



NO.  
24-26  
Local  
Life  
List

022

► **Mt. Tamalpais, CA**  
San Francisco's back-  
yard gem, Mt. Tam  
showcases more than  
50 miles of hiking  
trails. Tour the red-  
wood groves or bag  
East Peak on a 9-mile  
loop from the Pantoll  
trailhead. From the  
2,571-foot summit,  
see the Pacific and  
surrounding Bay Area.  
"It's strenuous, but  
peaceful," says Lauren  
Temmler, of San Fran-  
cisco, CA.

► **Lone Star Trail, TX** With 129 miles  
to choose from, this  
close-to-home path  
offers endless opportu-  
nities for southeast  
Texas hikers. And,  
because it's flat, it's  
the perfect place to  
bring newbies or get  
your trail legs before  
tougher hikes, says  
Gordon Start, of  
Houston, TX. Try the  
Big Creek Scenic Area  
for flowing streams  
and spring flowers.

► **Harriman State  
Park, NY** "Hiked  
there 10 times and  
didn't use the same  
trail twice," raves  
Christopher Bingham,  
of Massapequa, NY.  
Dayhike and overnight  
options abound in this  
lake-laden park out-  
side the Big Apple—  
and don't miss out on  
fall's color show. Try  
the Long Path Loop  
and spend the night  
in the William Brien  
Shelter.

## #27 READ THE NIGHT SKY

The Big Dipper is  
child's play. Use the  
app Star Chart (free)  
to ID these four con-  
stellations.

Summer  
**SAGITTARIUS**—*The  
Archer*



Single out the  
"Teapot": Look for its  
brightest star at the  
bottom of the spout.

Autumn  
**ANDROMEDA**—*The  
Chained Maiden*



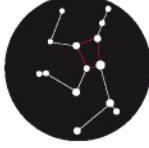
Locate the brightest  
star at the "junction"  
of the two streams.

Winter  
**CANIS MAJOR**—*The  
Greater Dog*



You already know  
Orion; now find his  
pup to the southeast.  
The brightest star in  
the sky, Sirius, indi-  
cates his chest.

Spring  
**HERCULES**—*The Hero*



Locate the trapezoid  
that makes Hercules's  
torso.

# Find the Ultimate Hiking Partner.

By Steve Friedman

WHERE YOU GO MATTERS, BUT NOT AS MUCH AS WHO YOU BRING. CHOOSE WISELY.

→ I SCREAMED AT MY HIKING PARTNER. HE DESERVED IT.

“Hey, Dave!”

He had been singing in a language I didn’t recognize for 35 of the last 45 minutes, even though I had made him promise, specifically and in writing, before we set out from New York City to the White Mountains of New Hampshire, that he would limit his trail singing to 10 minutes a day.

“Yo, Dave!” I screamed again, when he ignored me. “Remember how we agreed about singing? Remember what I told you about the sublime hush of the mountains?” (It was Dave’s first backpacking trip).

Dave stopped, turned around, brought his hands together palm to palm in front of his chest, and closed his eyes.

We were half a mile and 45 minutes into a 7-mile hike that promised to be worse than the hike the day before—which had been a granite-scrabbling, chest-heaving, bickering nightmare.

“Chanting is not singing,” Dave said, then sped up, fast enough that he disappeared from sight, not so fast that I couldn’t still hear him singing. (We had also agreed before the trip that we would



walk at the same pace.)

“Daaaaaaaave!!” I screamed a third time, and he turned around. “Let’s stop for a minute and have a snack. Some of those soft and juicy mango slices would be great. Why don’t you get them from your pack?”

I wasn’t hungry. But I desperately needed a break from the awful noises coming out of Dave’s mouth. Mostly, though, I suggested the snack because I suspected Dave of having secretly sucked down an unconscionable amount of the mangos I had packed specially for this trip. I planned to confront him with the evidence.

“You have the mango slices,” Dave said. “No,” I said. “You do.” “Nope, definitely not. I haven’t seen

them.”

“I’m pretty sure I saw you pack the mango slices this morning.” Without intending it, I’d let my voice rise to a sort of sreech.

Dave stared.

“You are addicted to blaming and shaming!” he said. “You are poisoning yourself with paranoia. I’m worried about you.”

It was only the second day of our four-day hiking trip, and it was not going as smoothly as I’d hoped. I had spent weeks planning this hike to three of the Appalachian Mountain Club’s eight White Mountains huts. The idea was, we would tackle lung-busting hikes in ancient mountains, at the peak of fall color, and not have to worry about carrying food or shelter, because at each hut we would be fed delicious and bountiful meals by cheerful college-age hut keepers, and sleep in perfectly comfortable bunks, a pillow and three woolen blankets provided. (The AMC system is the closest thing America has to the legendary huts of the Alps.)

I had devoted even more time to contemplating whom to invite. He or she would be cheerful but not chirpy. He or she would be willing to endure discomfort, but not a masochist, decisive but not bossy. He or she would be strong as a yak, placid as a mountain marmot, silent and wide-eyed as a snowy owl while listening raptly to my tales of mysterious and unsolved multiple murders nearby.

And I had ended up with a passive-aggressive, chanting, lying mango hog. I had ended up with Dave.

What had gone wrong? How could I set it right?

I took a breath. I had experience hiking with all sorts of challenging people (more on that soon).

“Dave, I’m not angry,” I lied. “But you know, the first place I shopped in New York only carried regular mango slices, which can be really tough and dry, so I made a special trip to find those soft and juicy man...”

“Let go of your need to otherize and stop worrying so much. You definitely have the mango slices. I saw you pack them. Besides, I don’t think you really need any extra snacks, if you know what I mean.” He looked at my stomach. I felt my fists clench.

“Listen, you bast....”

“We are blessed,” Dave said, and closed his eyes and put his hands back in front



# NO. 30 GLISSADE



**Ready!** Pick a low-angle (less than 30°) slope with soft snow. Sit with bent knees and boots pointing downhill. (Never glissade while wearing crampons.) Grasp your self-arrest tool (such as a trekking pole, ice axe, or sturdy stick) firmly against your hip like an oar.



**Go!** Use your hips to steer and your self-arrest tool as a rudder—applying downward pressure acts as a brake.



**Stop!** If there's no natural run-out, you'll want to self-arrest: Flip onto your belly and dig the "rudder" as deep into the snowpack as you can. Make sure to practice self-arresting in a safe spot first.

of his chest and resumed chanting. Or singing. I was panting.

“Breathe,” Dave said. “Don’t forget to breathe.”

I LIKE A QUIET walk in the woods as much as the next guy and have even undertaken some solo camping trips and enjoyed them. Nothing against cracking open the soul through personal communion with the hushed and unpeopled wilderness. [See page 43 for more on going alone.] But isn’t a camping trip, like a meal or a movie, usually more fun with someone else?

It is, I had learned from experience. I had also learned, long before Dave, that the wrong partner could transform even a sun-kissed, shadow-dappled, vista-soaked, pine-scented idyll into a nightmare.

Joey was one of my greatest teachers. He had forgotten the compass and map when we hiked into the Adirondacks seven years ago. Honest mistake, sure. But then he yelled at me for getting us lost. Worse, while I had packed my cherished camp coffee press, Joey had forgotten the coffee, and then accused me of being an “addict” because I complained. College sweetheart Mary Ann, bold and fearless if not always prudent, had led us farther and farther into the bear-infested (I heard them growling, no matter what she remembers) terrain high above Little Yosemite Valley. With cliffs all around, we searched for a path that she was “pretty sure” she had heard about and that appeared on no map, until I was hanging onto the branches of a manzanita, my feet dangling above hundreds of feet of air and she was yelling, “We’re not going to let this mountain beat us!” It beat us.

Of course there were other, more prosaically annoying hiking partners: The guy who refused to carry his share of the cooking equipment, but was all too comfortable eating the food; the other guy who was never satisfied with any campsite, who always wanted to hike a little farther, until it was nearly dark, and we had to camp at a place not nearly as good as the first choice; the guy who would not shut up about how yes, where we were hiking was nice, but it didn’t compare to the mountain/beach/meadow he had visited recently.

This time would be different, I had vowed, as I went about deciding whom to invite to New Hampshire. For this trip, I would be accompanied by The Ultimate Hiking Partner. We would like and respect each other. We would share wilderness goals and views on things like scary backcountry tales and whether peanut-butter-cup trail mix or plain chocolate bars are preferable hiking snacks.

I could have posted something on hiking message boards. But I wanted to bring a friend—someone with whom my friendship would become more profound by virtue of sharing a wilderness experience. If said friend had never backpacked before, that was OK, because we wouldn’t be hanging bear bags or

pitching tents on this trip, anyway. If he had some odd traits, that was OK. I had my quirks, too. Who doesn’t? Besides, which would be worse, a buddy who hiked to a different drummer or a grim stranger well-versed in knot tying who didn’t want to hear my ghost stories? That’s how I came to punch Dave’s number.

**“NAMASTE, MOTHER\*\*\*\*\*!** You have reached the Badass Buddha/Gangsta Guru/Spiritual MVP, ready to enlighten your emotionally stuck ass.”

“Hi, Dave,” I said. “I have a proposition.”

Dave is a personal trainer who majored in philosophy and religion. So he’s very fit and apt to appreciate the spirituality of the wilderness. His inexperience gave me pause, but of course introducing novices to the outdoors is a life-list item itself (page 41), and besides, it meant he would defer to me on points of contention that often arise between hiking partners: how far and fast to hike, what snacks to bring, when to eat, who carried what.

*But isn’t a camping trip, like a meal or a movie, usually more fun with someone else?*

True, Dave chants and sings a lot, sometimes in public, and attends “emotional release” dance workshops. He practices Qigong and has ingested the hallucinogen Ayahuasca five times in four months, under the guidance of shamans who are either ignorant of or willing to ignore the widely held caution against swallowing the drug more than twice a year. The fifth and final (for now) ceremony had been dedicated, Dave said, “to sealing my portal, because when my demon came out on my fourth ceremony, he wouldn’t go back in.”

But Dave is smart, and entertaining, and strong. We met playing basketball, and while we both like to win, we’re also amused and sometimes horrified at the screaming arguments some of the other guys at the gym engage in. We run together in Central Park. He has told me more than once that he feels sorry for people who don’t spend enough time outdoors. And he likes ghost stories.

“Hell, yes,” he said when I outlined the plan. “We’ll do Qigong and yoga on the trail. We’ll be emotionally naked in the wilderness. I will sing to the trees, and to the flowers and to the mountains.”

“I think it will be better if we just enjoy the quiet of the wilderness,” I said, already questioning the wisdom of inviting him. That’s when I proposed the limited singing document. “Just, you know, try to enjoy the moment. And be ready to leave at 2 p.m. on Saturday. We have a long drive.”

**AT 1 P.M.**, Dave called to say he would be three hours late. At 3:30, he said he couldn't leave Manhattan until 7 p.m. At 7:30, he finally showed up at the Hertz office on Manhattan's Upper West Side. I stared at him.

"Don't shame me," Dave said. "I carry a heavy burden of shame. And let go of your anger. You'll feel better. Be in the moment."

The drive took almost six hours. For the first hour, we argued over the perfect five-point checklist for picking a girlfriend. (Final result: intelligence, sense of humor, beauty, attitude toward sex, how much she likes you. We left out ankle circumference because we agreed it was objectifying.)

We arrived at the Highland Lodge, near Crawford Notch, New Hampshire, at 1:30 a.m. In the morning, we would start a 20-mile hike connecting Greenleaf, Galehead, and Zealand Falls Huts.

But between Dave's insistence on sleeping in and the hike logistics (dropping our car at the end point and getting a shuttle to the trailhead), we didn't get an early start as I'd planned. We began the hike to Greenleaf mid-afternoon, about 50 feet behind two middle-aged women with short hair and hiking poles.

"We can beat them," I said.

"Beat them?" Dave said. "We will dominate them! We will crush them!"

This cheered and disturbed me. For all his spiritual jabber and fancy rationalizations, at heart Dave possessed a certain raw competitiveness and an ugly-in-a-certain-light need to not just win, but to make sure there were losers. He reminded me of me. Not in an entirely positive way.

We surged forward. We devoured the first half-mile climb, passing the women with ease, and then kept pushing for another mile until we were panting. I thought I might vomit.

"Ugh," I gasped.

"It's Qigong time," Dave said, and started waving his arms and bouncing on the balls of his feet. "C'mon!"

"I think it's puking time," I said.

Just then the women rounded a boulder below us, smiling, breathing easily, moving steadily.

We gaped.

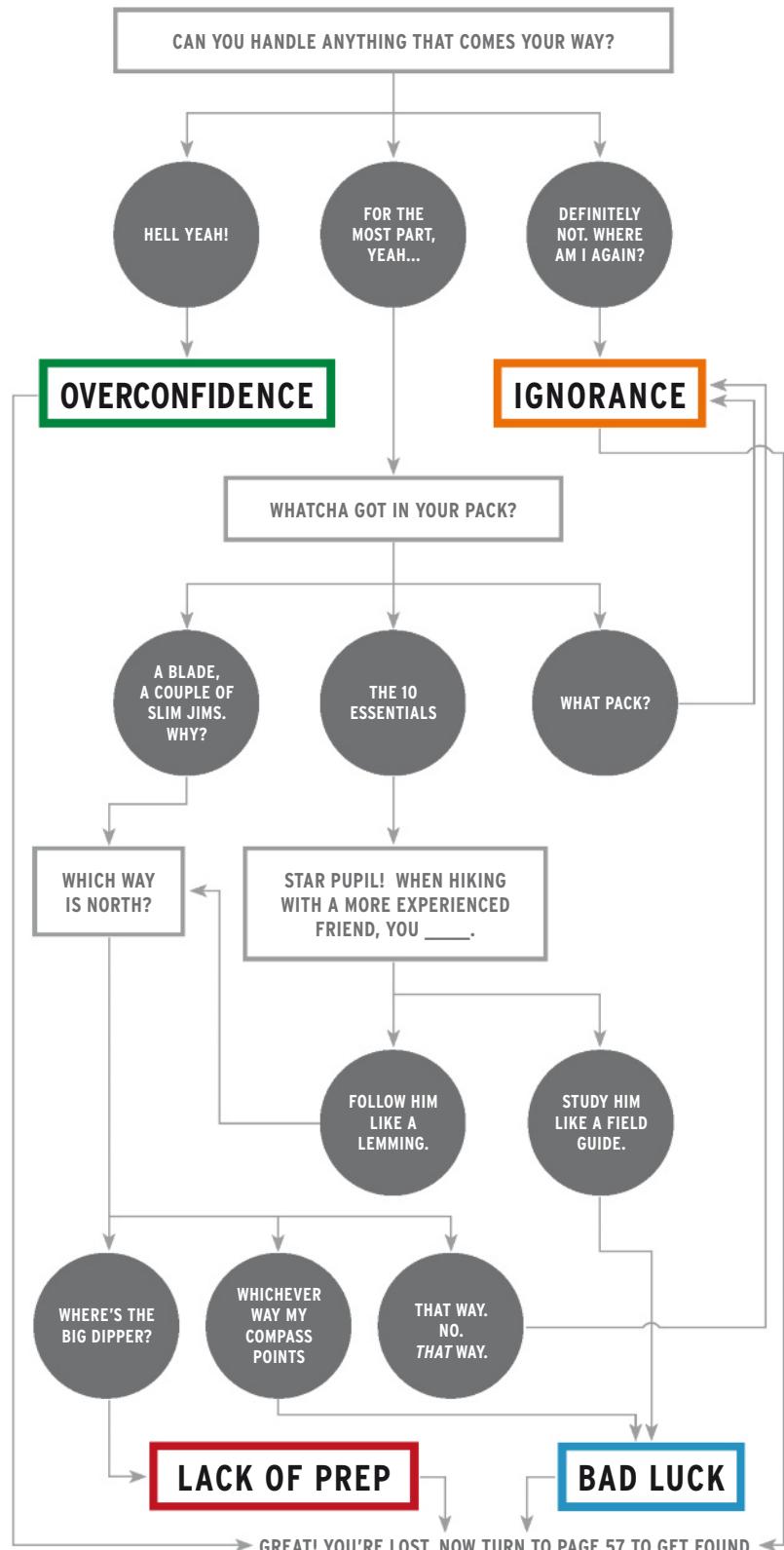
"Tortoise and the hare," one of the women said as they passed.

We continued to ascend, but more slowly. Actually, incredibly slowly. Which suited the scenery. We stopped at vistas overlooking crimson-splashed mountains. We trudged up absurdly rocky trails and agreed that the guidebook had been correct, and that no person, except for the two women who Dave referred to over the rest of the hike as "those inhuman hiking machines," could possibly move faster than a mile an hour on these trails. We gasped and stumbled and trudged and partly to deal with our pain, partly because Dave and I both like to talk, we argued and made lists.

We compiled a list of 10 greatest U.S. presidents and 10 greatest athletes of all time and 10 greatest vitamins ("I don't think bee

# #31: GET LOST.

Anyone can get lost. And most of us should: There's no better reminder about how small and fragile we are, and you're not likely to forget it. But how will it happen to you?





## #32 LEARN TO I.D. POISON IVY

Never hike in fear again:  
Recognize the stuff and  
hike in peace.



The leaves are either smooth or notched (never serrated). It grows in clumps of three; it can be shiny or dull, green to red.

## #33 *Drink wine from a fountain.*

→**TRUE, HIKING SPAIN'S** historic Camino de Santiago is the real prize here. But 115 miles into the 500-mile route, you'll encounter a trailside wine fountain inscribed with the text: "Pilgrim, if you wish to arrive at Santiago full of strength and vitality, have a drink of this great wine and make a toast to happiness." Winemaking has been a staple of the Navarra region for more than 1,000 years—about as long as people have been walking this path—so stop at Bodegas Irache winery for a free taste and raise a glass to your friends back home (yes, there's a webcam). Bonus: easy logistics and terrain.

[Info.hikingthecamino.com](http://Info.hikingthecamino.com)

pollen really counts," I said, to which Dave replied, "Open your eyes, open your heart, and then your soul might finally crack open") and 10 greatest film directors. "You can't even consider such a list without including Godard," Dave insisted. "His work was seminal."

"Have you ever seen a Godard film, Dave?"

"What's that got to do with it? We're talking about greatness, not narrow definitions and how you can't bear to let go of your small life."

Dave stopped walking, which didn't really require too much, as we were barely moving. I suspected we would need to fine-tune our approach to pace the remainder of the trip. If we weren't sprinting in a self-immolating fever, or nearly crawling, or jabbering, Dave was either about 30 yards ahead of me, or 30 yards behind.

I sighed, started moving again, and after we hashed out the 10 greatest left-handed basketball players of all time, and after Dave persuaded me to say "we are blessed" and to do some breathing exercises when we arrived at a particularly transcendent view, and midway through an argument over the 10 greatest spiritual leaders of all time, we arrived at Greenleaf Hut.

The hike had taken almost three hours, so we arrived just 20 minutes before dinner, and had time only to claim our bunks, wash our hands, and sit down with the 20 or so hikers already there. We were sitting across from the women who had smoked us on the trail.

"I want to apologize," Dave said to them, after turkey soup, before salad. "On the trail today, we were otherizing you two."

I kicked Dave under the table. "It's his first big hiking trip," I explained. "He's tired."

"I'm not tired," Dave said. "I'm blessed. We're all blessed."

Turned out the women were not inhuman hiking machines at all. They were funny and kind and perfectly willing to accept Dave's apology, even if they didn't quite understand it. We chatted with them about hiking and pace and being blessed and Dave and I promised each other that we would hike more like them, and then we slept.

Over breakfast, we chatted with the women some more. They had known each other for years. They camped together often. Without talking, they seemed to share an ease and comfort around each other. I noticed that when they packed, one would occasionally close an open buckle on the other's pack. Maybe this was what Ultimate Hiking Partners looked like. Or maybe they looked like the quiet, white-bearded man and his wise-cracking daughter who announced, at dinner the night before, that

"The old man would still be on the mountain in the dark, if he hadn't brought me along." Her dad smiled (he had first brought her to the huts when she could barely walk). And what about the two perpetually frowning, lean, 30ish guys who studied topo maps together, had their gear packed before breakfast, and as Dave said, "hogged the pancakes"? Were they good partners? Probably, but they didn't make it look like fun.

I wondered if other hikers were sizing up Dave and me in the same way. I turned to ask Dave what he thought. But he wasn't there. Where was Dave? I looked in the main room. No Dave. I checked the bathroom, too, and the porch. Finally, with a heavy heart, I returned to the bunkroom and looked up, up, up, to the top of a triple-decker bunk. There was Dave, sitting cross-legged, meditating. We were the last to hit the trail.

### IT TOOK US 45 MINUTES to climb half a mile. Dave

sang, or chanted. (I never learned the difference.) And then, halfway to what looked like a beautiful summit, the mango incident.

Instead of lunging at the lying mango thief, I said nothing. I remained still. If I wanted Dave to be The Ultimate Hiking Partner, maybe I had to act like one myself. I would be dignified. I would forgive. I would be generous.

I told Dave that maybe he was right, and I probably did have the soft and juicy mango slices. I often forget where things are packed. Maybe Dave could help me open up a little more, trust a little more. Maybe I should start to breathe more deeply, appreciate the countless blessings surrounding me.

"Damn straight, son," Dave said.

At the top of the ridge, we stopped, removed our packs, and turned in 360-degree circles to suck in the sweet air, to regard the explosive oranges and yellows and reds around us. "We really are blessed," I said. I was grateful to be sharing this with Dave. "Now let's have some soft and juicy mango slices."

I dug in my pack. And dug. And dug. No mango slices. I looked up. Dave had them in his hand. He had pulled them from his pack.

"You have the mango slices?" I said.

"Yeah, but I was content to let you take the blame. I wanted to put you in the shame spiral."

I chuckled, and then I laughed. Dave laughed, too. We laughed together on the top of Garfield Ridge. We gobbled mango. We both congratulated ourselves on defeating what would clearly be the most difficult part of the day's hike.

Then we descended into hiking hell.



"This is brutal," I said, as we picked our way down slick, small, crooked rocks.

"We are blessed," Dave said, grunting.

"Man, this is ridiculously hard," I said, clambering up more slick, small, crooked rocks, slipping, clambering some more. "New Hampshire sort of sucks."

"Be in the moment," Dave said.

"I really might throw up," I said, after descending again, and climbing again, and descending and climbing and descending and looking up at another ascent.

"I am a humble light in heaven," Dave said.

I kept further complaints to myself because Ultimate Hiking Partners do not bitch and moan as much as I usually do. Over the next mile that felt like 10 miles, I concentrated on the fall foliage, screaming and subdued at the same time, the hush of the woods, the cold wind that washed us whenever we crested another rocky rise. I grunted and swore, but quietly, to myself, until I heard a crashing behind me. Dave had slipped on a rock.

"This is bullshit!" Dave said. "This is a bullshit hike!"

"Has the humble light in heaven dimmed?" I asked, and then Dave started laughing, and we stopped and sat on a rock and finished the mango slices and I admitted that I had never seen a Kurosawa

film, even though I had put him on the list. And Dave said that maybe we should try Ayahuasca together, that he knew a cool shaman, but "only if the plant calls you, because that's how it works."

What had changed? The trail didn't get easier. We didn't hike faster. The stunning scenery didn't get any more stunning. But every quarter mile or so one of us shouted, "This is bullshit!" and we both chuckled and cursed. The 7.7 miles took us eight hours.

More bountiful food, more cheerful staff, another night in the bunks, another witnessing of the grim guys grimly packing early in the morning, another enormous breakfast, an easier 7.2-mile hike that took us nine hours, because we walked slowly and at approximately the same pace, stopped frequently, and debated for a long time if we were bad people for ranking pretty hair in girlfriends, and if so, should we accept our badness and stop calling it badness and do our humble-light-in-heaven best to live in a shame-free world?

At Zealand Falls hut, we sat by an insanely peaceful and soothing waterfall, where we soaked our feet and discussed the five greatest planets, the five greatest ice cream flavors, and the five greatest comedians. (We were becoming more discriminating. Or just more weary.)

As we walked the final miles to our car

the next morning, I decided that The Ultimate Hiking Partner is, like cereal brand or mattress firmness, an intensely personal choice. Do you want to hike in purposeful silence, in grunting resignation, or in jabbering contention? Do you want someone who knows how to build a fire, or someone who can debate film history and rank spiritual leaders? Even if he's a lazy mango hog and unremitting chanter?

Maybe choosing the perfect partner is not primarily about gauging physical ability or capacity to endure hardship or industriousness or even tendency to snore (though all of those matter). Maybe the key is choosing someone who thinks like you, or who doesn't think like you, which provokes you to think in different ways. Maybe if you choose a conventional hiking partner based on conventional criteria, you'll end up with a conventional hike.

I had plenty of time to mull this over when we got stuck in horrible traffic on the drive home to New York. "Welcome back to hell," I said, raising my voice above the honking.

"Hell is inside us," said Dave. "Breathe. We are blessed." ■

*Steve Friedman is the author of *Lost on Treasure Island*. He wrote about back-country yoga in June 2013.*



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# GO HUGE

So you've ticked off most of the easy stuff. Time to trade in the training wheels. These trips and skills demand more time and experience, but you're ready. Welcome to the next level.

no.

34

*See the  
Northern  
Lights.*

Budget version: Try the south shore of Angle-worm Lake in Minnesota's Boundary Waters (target fall or winter).

Grander option: Head to Iceland (pictured). The months surrounding the equinoxes (September, October, February, March) offer the best balance of darkness, daylight, and borealis activity. Photographer Grant Ordelheide captured this Snæfellsnes Peninsula light show in September. For more trip ideas, go to [backpacker.com/northernlights](http://backpacker.com/northernlights).



NO. 35  
*Hike the  
Swiss Alps.*

With 14,000 miles of mountain trails, Switzerland has no shortage of spectacular paths. One of the best: The 15-mile Hardergrat Trail. Towering 4,000 feet above the charming town of Interlaken, it traverses a vertiginous ridge (see the cover) nearly the whole way. Pack all your drinking water and wait for dry conditions (the steep, open grass slopes get scary-slick when wet), then hike from town up to Harder Kulm at 4,300 feet. Continue northeast along the ridge with views of the endless, wildflower- and snow-covered peaks that blanket 65 percent of the country. Catch the late train at Brienz Rothorn to save your knees from the 5,000-foot descent, or sleep at the lodge here and continue another 7.5 miles to Brunig Pass on day two. INFO [interlaken.ch](http://interlaken.ch)

030

KY

BLACK MT., 4,139 FT. Sorry Kentucky high-pointers: Few hikers are fond of this tower-topped, coal-mining mountain.

NC MT. MITCHELL, 6,684 FT. You can drive to within 100 feet of the highest peak east of the Mississippi, but we recommend the 5.6-mile Mt. Mitchell Trail.





no.  
**36**  
*Stand on  
Half Dome's  
visor.*

Conquer your fear of heights—and 5,000 feet of elevation gain—and you can revel in one of the most beautiful spots in the country. For your best bet at snagging this coveted granite ledge to yourself, hit it as part of an overnight shuttle hike starting at the Cathedral Lakes trailhead at Tuolumne Meadows. Camp at Sunrise Creek near mile 9, then get up early to hit the cables before the dayhikers arrive. Finish by descending 8 miles to the Happy Isles trailhead. Bonus: As an overnighter, you can score your Half Dome permit along with your wilderness permit from a different pool than dayhikers. Apply for both together up to 24 weeks in advance. INFO [bit.ly/YoseWildPermits](http://bit.ly/YoseWildPermits)

# On My List



1. Thalay Sagar, north face (India)
2. Annapurna III, southeast ridge (Nepal)
3. Free climb El Capitan (Yosemite)
4. Become fluent in Spanish
5. Visit the Arctic NWR during caribou migration
6. Hike the Pacific Crest Trail
7. Parachute out of an airplane

—CONRAD ANKER MOUNTAINEER, FIRST ASCENT COLLECTOR, CAPTAIN OF THE NORTH FACE ATHLETE TEAM

## no. 37 Hike barefoot.

Sonnet Baker, of Boulder, CO, has been hiking barefoot since 2010.



→ Want to supercharge your wilderness experience? Take off your shoes, says Michael Sandler, author of *Barefoot Walking*, who once dayhiked the Bright Angel Trail in the Grand Canyon without ever putting on his shoes. "It's like suddenly going to high-definition," he says. "Your mind quiets, and all your senses improve as you focus on each footstep." Do it safely: **1. Take baby steps.** Your first time on a trail, go a max of about 200 yards. Give yourself a rest day to let your feet recover, then ramp up by adding just 100 yards at a time. **2. Seek hard surfaces.** For the first month, concrete and hard-packed trail will give you the sensory feedback you need to make sure you're using good form and aren't slamming your heels. For more walking tips, go to [backpacker.com/howtowalk](http://backpacker.com/howtowalk). **3. Let your skin guide you.** It's going to feel painful first. Always carry shoes ("I call them hand-weights," Sandler says). When your soles feel tender, lace up. Get more tips at [mindfulrunning.org](http://mindfulrunning.org).

**#38: Go night hiking. Key tip:**  
*Wear your lamp at chest level for better depth perception.*



### Princeton Tec Vizz

This lamp (\$50; 2.8 oz.; [princtontec.com](http://princtontec.com)) packs 150 lumens and burns 112 hours.



NO.  
**39** Scare  
yourself.

→ My heart knows it first, pumping percussion right into my eardrums. Then, my right leg figures it out, jogging and juicing like I've had too much caffeine. And right around now, when I look down, I see all the space between me and the ground and realize that the fall from here would probably do me in. Here it is—that moment I've been waiting for.

The danger is pure and immediate. To climb whatever scares you is to lean your shoulder into the self-preservation instinct and push. And this creates space—backs up the dividing line between fear and comfort—and ultimately opens you up to new terrain, new experiences, new opportunities.

Setting foot back on level ground, a rush of endorphins flushes in. That's what keeps me coming back.

—Casey Lyons

**+** Gear up



Five Ten Guide  
Tennie Mid

This boot crushes slabby and rocky terrain thanks to the sticky Stealth rubber sole and toe, the well-padded ankle, and the supportive PU midsole. \$140; 2 lbs.; [fiveten.com](http://fiveten.com)



Mammut Neon  
Crag 28

The waxed canvas material of this single compartment top-loader is rhino-tough, and the plastic frame sheet supports loads up to 25 pounds. \$100; 2 lbs. 2 oz.; [mammut.ch](http://mammut.ch)

HALL  
OF  
FAME  
GEAR



PHOTOS BY (FROM LEFT) COURTESY (2); JEFF DIENER; TOM & PAT LEESON. TEXT BY JOSETTE DESCHAMBEAULT (BEARS)

**Sleep on snow.**  
Visit [backpacker.com/wintercamping](http://backpacker.com/wintercamping) for skills, tips, and trip ideas.

NO.  
**40**

**BONUS** GET EVEN MORE GEAR AND KNOW-HOW BY DOWNLOADING OUR FALL GEAR GUIDE FOR FREE: [BACKPACKER.COM/IPAD](http://BACKPACKER.COM/IPAD).

**#41: SEE A GRIZZLY BEAR.**

→ "Be smart about when and where to go," says Casey Anderson, director of Montana Grizzly Encounter, which leads griz-spotting tours. "The more the bears are habituated to humans, the easier they are to find, and the more predictable they are. Hit Yellowstone and Glacier National Parks in May and early June when

the bears are feeding down in the valleys. In Alaska, target the salmon runs in July and August. Be safe: Stay at least 100 yards away and always carry bear spray." For more info, go to [backpacker.com/survival/bears](http://backpacker.com/survival/bears).





# MAKE THIS THE SEASON OF STOKE

A jacket, backpack or headlamp from REI is more than just a gift. It's adventure. So this holiday season, give them the best in outdoor gear and clothing from REI.





## #42: Celebrate Christmas at Phantom Ranch.

→Late on December 24, as most dads were cursing assembly instructions or sipping one last nightcap, I was rodent-proofing our food bag at the bottom of the Grand Canyon. My wife, Jen, our three boys, and I had hiked down the South Kaibab Trail earlier that day, descending from snow-covered rim to

sun-warmed canyon. At Bright Angel Campground, we hung tinsel on our tent, strolled under cottonwoods, and exchanged holiday greetings with other campers.

Normally, I avoid such busy spots, but what makes this place a dubious choice the rest of the year makes it perfect on Christmas. Want to bring



family or friends who aren't up to carrying a full pack? Mule service. We didn't use it, but we did buy a cold beer at Phantom Ranch (the historic lodge also serves a holiday feast). In the evening, the kids joined a sing-along with a group of caroling rafters and delighted in gifts from our camp-ground neighbors. So is anything missing from a Grand Canyon Christmas? Just one: last-minute trips to the store. —Dennis Lewon

**DO IT** Permits required (\$10 plus \$5/person/night). Pack instep crampons for the upper portions of the trail. Camp one night at Indian Gardens to break up the ascent. Info [nps.gov/grca](http://nps.gov/grca)

### Gear up

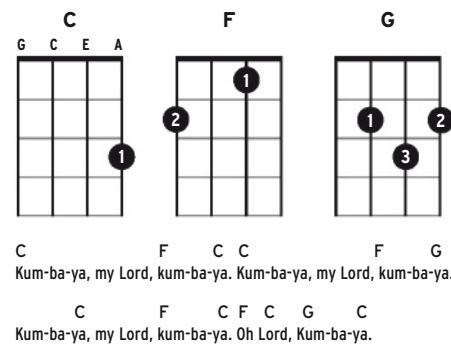
The North Face Kings Canyon 4

At 60 square feet and less than 6.5 pounds, this is a palace for a young family, and lugging it won't break your back. Headroom is decadent (46 inches at peak), ventilation is excellent, and blustery weather doesn't faze it. \$499; 6 lbs. 6 oz.; [thenorthface.com](http://thenorthface.com)

## #43: LEAD A CAMPFIRE SING-ALONG.

There's nothing to bond a group like off-key singing around the fire. Harmonica and cowbell are light, but we like the ukulele for its balance of portability, simplicity, and versatility. Pick up the polycarbonate Outdoor Ukulele (\$99; 14.4 oz.; [outdoorukulele.com](http://outdoorukulele.com)), which can endure even the worst weather. Then learn your first song. Even rapper 50 Cent couldn't resist this classic.

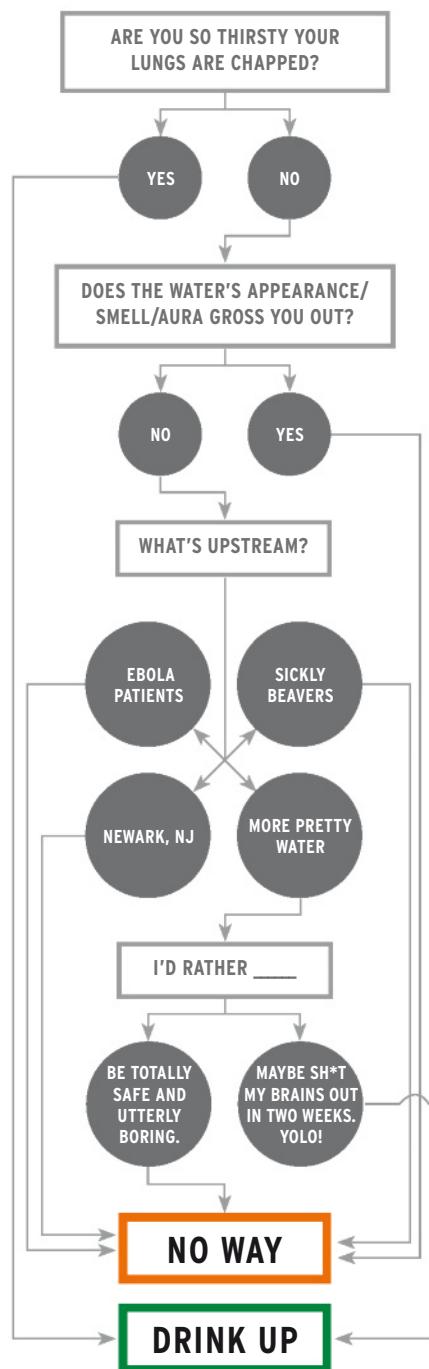
### TABLATURE



# NO. 44

## DRINK STRAIGHT FROM A STREAM.

Every hiker should experience this primal bliss. But should it be this water?





Dr. Maurie Markman, MD  
Medical Oncologist

# WHEN YOU DON'T KNOW WHAT TO SAY, **STAND UP.**

When someone you love is diagnosed with cancer, you have the power to help. There are many ways you can stand up and show that you care.

**THEY TALK, YOU LISTEN.** One of the most helpful and important things you can do is listen—without judgment and resisting the urge to give advice.

**DON'T ASK, DO TELL.** Instead of waiting to be asked for help when it is needed, be specific about what you can do and when, such as: prepare a meal, babysit, pick up groceries, help with pets, or provide rides to and from appointments.

**LIVE AND LEARN.** Educate yourself about your loved one's diagnosis and treatment. When you understand what a cancer patient is going through, you're better able to help keep information clear, track questions, and know how you can be most useful.

**STAY CONNECTED.** After the initial diagnosis, people tend to drift away. Be someone to count on for the long haul. Check in, send a quick note, or drop off a book. Small gestures go a long way.

Visit [ShowThatYouCare.org](http://ShowThatYouCare.org) to learn more about how you can stand up for someone you love.

Christina Applegate  
SU2C Ambassador

Pamela Cromwell  
Cancer Survivor



Cancer Treatment Centers of America is a proud supporter of Stand Up To Cancer, an initiative designed to accelerate groundbreaking cancer research for the benefit of the patient. Stand Up To Cancer is a program of the Entertainment Industry Foundation, a 501(c)(3) charitable organization.

NUMBER  
**45**HIKE THE  
**JOHN  
MUIR  
TRAIL.**THE  
**#1**  
TREK  
EVERY  
HIKER  
SHOULD DO,  
ACCORDING  
TO OUR  
READER  
SURVEY**47,000**  
FEET OF TOTAL ELEVATION GAINHIKING SEASON: TYPICALLY JULY TO  
SEPTEMBER, DEPENDING ON SNOWPACK**211**  
MILES  
TOTAL LENGTH  
(BUT ADD 11  
MILES TO GET  
DOWN OFF MT.  
WHITNEY)**3.5 DAYS**ABOUT THE FASTEST YOU CAN  
HIKE IT (UNSUPPORTED SPEED  
RECORD IS 3 DAYS, 10 HOURS,  
59 MINUTES, SET BY ANDREW  
BENTZ IN 2014)**21-30 DAYS**  
TYPICAL HIKER ITINERARY**14,496** Feet HIGH  
POINT (MT. WHITNEY)DIRECTION  
HIKERS  
CHOOSESOUTH  
TO  
NORTH  
**25%**NORTH  
TO  
SOUTH  
**75%**Get interactive maps and a guide to ultralighting the trail at [backpacker.com/jmt](http://backpacker.com/jmt).**46** *Live in a national park.*

The summer I lived in Yellowstone, I saw bison out my kitchen window. I passed a mama moose every day on my way to the office. I averaged 30 miles a week of hiking, much of it part of my job as a Student Con-

servation Association (SCA) intern. And I learned a secret: The best way to *really* get to know a park is to live there.

As a resident, I had the time, knowledge, and access to truly explore. On my days

off, I was in prime position to hit the trail. I knew the best tricks for getting permits and the coolest out-of-the-way corners.

Try it. The unparalleled access is worth the time, whether between jobs, after you

retire, or as a permanent way of life. Here are some resources to get you started.

—Rachel Zurer

**SCA** Ages 15 and up; semi-volunteer placements on public lands nationwide. [thesca.org](http://thesca.org)  
**Volunteers in Parks** All ages; some posi-

tions provide housing. [volunteer.gov](http://volunteer.gov)

**CoolWorks** Clearinghouse for paid positions with park concessionaires. [coolworks.com](http://coolworks.com)

**National Park Service** Federal jobs can be tough to get; many are seasonal. [usajobs.gov](http://usajobs.gov)

# #47 HIKE IN A STORM.

HALL  
OF  
FAME  
GEAR

Don't run for shelter when the sky opens up. Embrace nature's wild side—and your own. But stay (relatively) dry with these top storm-hiking picks from our gear team.

▲ In persistent rain (with no wind), a hat trumps a hood because it improves visibility without stifling hearing. We like **Outdoor Research's Seattle Sombrero** (\$60; 3.2 oz.; [outdoorresearch.com](http://outdoorresearch.com)), which has a shaped, 360-degree brim that siphons water away from your head, face, and neck.

■ Priority #1: a good jacket. The **Rab Myriad** (\$375; 14 oz.; [rab.uk.com](http://rab.uk.com)) has the features to handle sustained foul weather—a fully adjustable hood with moldable brim, adjustable



▲ **Outdoor Research Seattle Sombrero**



■ **Rab Myriad**



■ **MontBell Peak Shell Pants**

cuffs, a high collar—and the breathability to let you deploy them all day without overheating, thanks to its air-permeable Polartec NeoShell fabric.

● You only throw waterproof pants on when the rain's coming down hard, so go for a pair that's superlight and packable, like the simple, pull-on **MontBell Peak Shell Pants** (\$99; 4.6 oz.; [montbell.us](http://montbell.us)).

To keep your gear dry, you have options. Individual dry bags, like **Granite Gear's eVent Sil Drysacks** (\$21-35; 1.2-2 oz.; [granitegear.com](http://granitegear.com)), let you protect key items. A pack cover, like **Sea to Summit's Ultra-Sil Pack Cover** (\$30-45; 2-4.6 oz.; [seatosummit.com](http://seatosummit.com)), prevents your pack from getting heavy with water weight, but limits access. Or just line your pack with a heavy-duty trash compactor bag.



**Introducing Technical, Insulated Apparel**

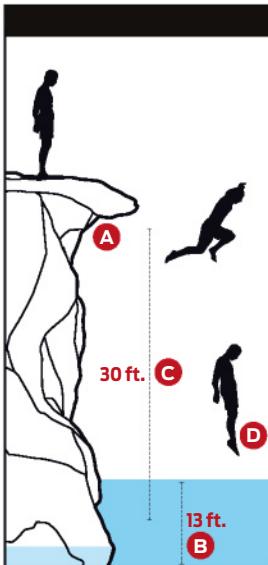
**Outfitting Dirtbags Everywhere...**

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**WOMEN'S SUNSHINE JACKET**  
& Men's Third Pitch Jacket

**DOWNTEK**  
WINDTEK

**WOMEN'S SUNSHINE JACKET**  
& Men's Third Pitch Jacket



## NO.48: CLIFF JUMP.

It's a guaranteed adrenaline rush. But do it as safely as possible with these tips from the World High Diving Federation.

**A.** Look for an overhanging cliff. ▶ Swim the landing area before jumping in, and scout your exit. **B.** 13 feet: minimum safe depth. Make sure the water is clear so you don't hit hidden obstacles. ▶ 50 feet: max safe height for experienced jumpers (but heights are hard to estimate; err on the safe side) **C.** 30 feet: better bet ▶ Wear shoes (easier exit) **D.** Point your toes to the water, tense your body, cross your arms or keep them close to your sides. ▶ Never jump alone. ▶ Don't jump off a waterfall, it could suck you under.



NO.  
**49**  
Learn to  
rappel.

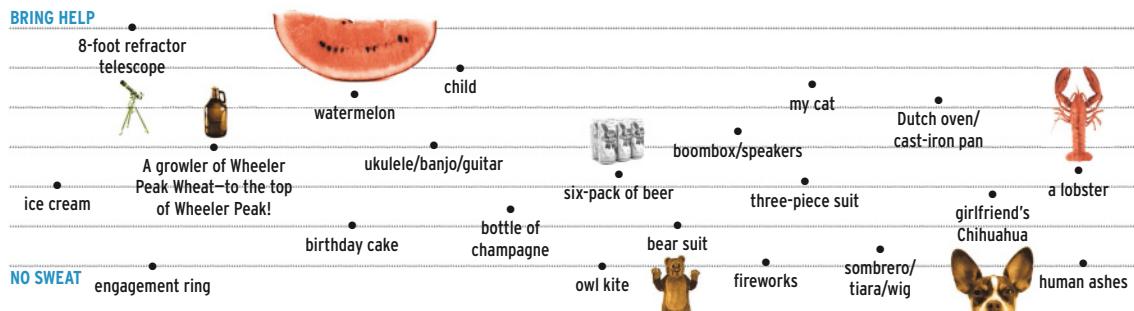
Just a few hours of instruction and pieces of gear can open a whole new world, like this spot in Neon Canyon in Grand Staircase-Escalante NM, Utah.

**Learn it** You'll need to acquire this skill in person—no YouTube. Check with your local climbing gym for beginner classes.

**+ Gear up** Before you go it alone, you'll need to buy—and learn to use—the basics, like these top picks from the editors of *Climbing*: a harness (try the comfy, budget-friendly Edelrid Jay; \$55; [scarpa.com](http://scarpa.com)); a belay device (check out the Black Diamond Big Air XP; \$30; [blackdiamondequipment.com](http://blackdiamondequipment.com)); a rope (the Mammut Infinity Classic 9.5 is a great deal; \$150; [mammut.ch](http://mammut.ch)), and a backup system (see [climbing.com/skill/rappel-to-ascend](http://climbing.com/skill/rappel-to-ascend)).

**50 HAUL SOMETHING SURPRISING TO THE TOP OF A MOUNTAIN. HERE'S WHAT YOU REPORTED WITNESSING IN OUR READER SURVEY.**

**RAD**



READERS  
CHOICE

NO. 51-53  
Local Life List

► **Goldmyer Hot Springs, WA** This paradise 55 miles from Seattle feels like a world away. Reserve one of the 20 daily permits, then hike 5 miles (11 in winter) to the four natural hot pools. "A roaring creek, and swimsuits optional," raves Shertl Larson of Oak Harbor. Info [goldmyer.org](http://goldmyer.org)

► **Sylvania Wilderness, MI** This 18,327-acre U.P. area and its 30-plus lakes is a favorite weekend getaway for Jacquie Ptacek of Madison, WI. Her pick: Canoe from Crooked Lake to Clark Lake (easy portage required). Basecamp at Cedar or Balsam campsites. Info [bit.ly/SylvaniaWild](http://bit.ly/SylvaniaWild)

► **Evans Notch, ME** "This spot has plenty of hiking and far fewer people than Pinkham and Crawford Notches," raves Chris Byrne of South Portland. "Go in August to gorge on berries along Blueberry Ridge," and bag two 3,000-footers on the 6.2-mile Royce Trail. Info [bit.ly/EvansNotch](http://bit.ly/EvansNotch)

# On My List



"For better or worse, my bucket list keeps growing. Kite skiing in Canada, paragliding in Antarctica, fat biking in Siberia, a winter traverse of Iceland... At some point, I'll go back to Antarctica and attempt the unsupported South Pole ski record. Up next: Patagonia in December, where I'll scout for an expedition next year (it's a secret for now).

— ERIC LARSEN POLAR EXPLORER, FIRST PERSON TO REACH BOTH POLES AND THE SUMMIT OF MT. EVEREST IN 365 DAYS

## NO. 55 BRING A FIRST- TIMER.

We're all for minting new backpackers, but some candidates require a bit more work than others. Know what you're getting yourself into: Administer this test to any would-be protégés, then go to [backpacker.com/firstnightout](http://backpacker.com/firstnightout) for practical tips.

### Suitability Test for Potential New Backpackers

Take your body weight, divide by 4. Carrying this much sounds like:

- A) Torture.
- B) What's with the math test? I thought we were going camping.
- C) Tuesday's CrossFit workout.

"Roughing it" is...

- A) ...a motel without HBO or air-conditioning
- B) ...a week without Wi-Fi
- C) ...sleeping naked in a shelter of pine branches

Only a \_\_\_\_ would go a week without a shower.

- A) homeless person
- B) hippie
- C) badass

How often has anyone called you whiny?

- A) A bunch, but it wasn't fair, it totally wasn't my fault!

- B) That one time my car ran out of gas and I had to push it to the gas station in the rain.
- C) NEVER!

On a scale of 1-10, how comfortable are you talking about poop?

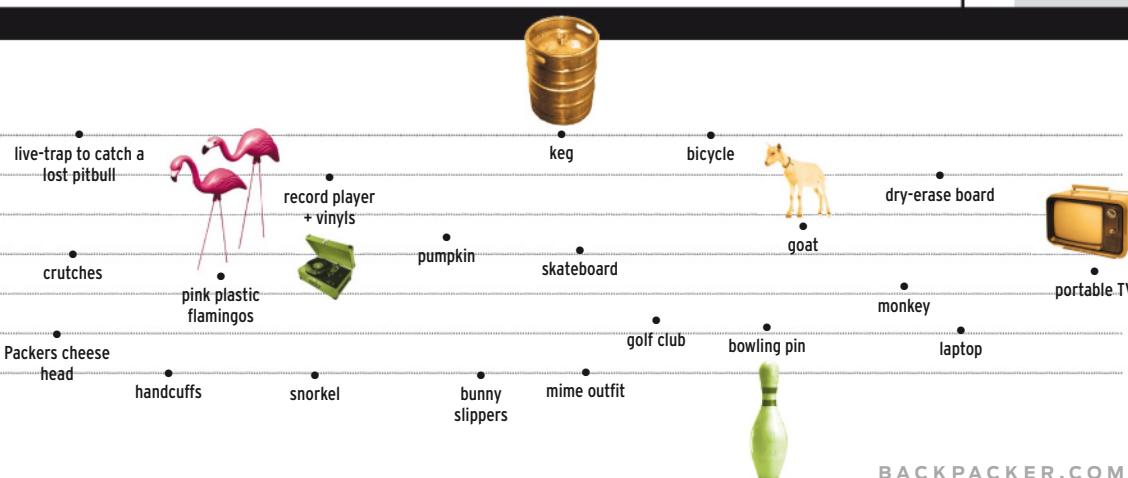
- A) I'm not answering that question.
- B) Um, 4?
- C) Let me tell you about this new fiber-rich cleanse I'm doing, you'll never believe...

If your would-be companion answered mostly....

...A: Start with some remedial dayhikes and car camping; you'll need to break 'em in.

...B: Plan an easy overnight in good weather. Hopefully that'll hook 'em.

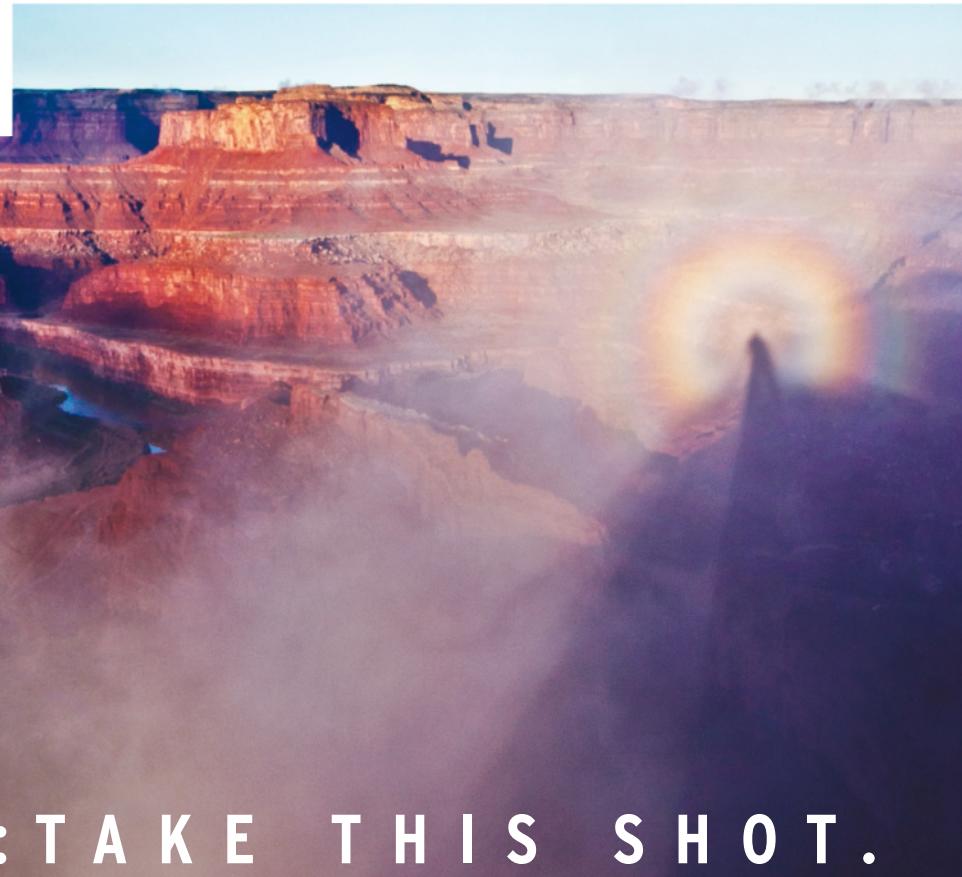
...C: Drag this natural along on whatever trip you're doing next.



WTF



Dead Horse Point, Utah



## N O . 5 7 : T A K E T H I S S H O T .

**It looks sci-fi, but this optical phenomenon is entirely earthly, and yours to capture—if you're ready for it.** ►Climb high The sun glory (circular rainbow) and Brocken spectre (shadow on clouds) are impossible to predict, but you need to be above clouds or fog to see them, like on a peak or canyon rim (or an airplane, but that's cheating). ►Time it The sun needs to be low in the sky; aim to shoot near sunrise or sunset. ►Position yourself Just like with a normal rainbow, glories happen opposite the sun. Get the Brocken spectre by putting yourself in between the sun and the rainbow, so your shadow projects onto the clouds. If possible, move to a spot where you can also see some of the surrounding landscape; that'll make the shot more interesting. ►Expose for the highlights It's better to have parts of the scene too dark to than lose detail to blown-out highlights. Shoot RAW format if you can, and make sure the spectre is in focus.

## #58: Climb For Charity.

In just two years, **Steven Reinhold**, 29, of Waynesville, NC, has raised \$10,000 for Big City Mountaineers (BCM) by participating in BACKPACKER Summit for Someone (SFS) climbs—making him one of the program's top contributors. See below for details on how you can join the next one in July 2015, and read on for Reinhold's tips.

**BP How did you get involved?**  
**SR** I really believe in BCM's mission of getting urban youth into the wilderness. My trials by trail have had a profound effect on my life,

teaching me resiliency and perseverance. I like helping provide that opportunity to others.

**BP Why not just donate cash?**  
**SR** By spreading awareness of the program, I can raise



more than I could possibly give myself—and a hike is more fun.

**BP Any fundraising advice?**  
**SR** Try to provide something of value for your donors. Make a video, sell T-shirts or water bottles or photos, throw a party—make them feel like they're getting something. Then show them the payoff of their donations: kids in the outdoors.

**BP What advice would you give someone on the fence about signing up?**  
**SR** Do it! All great endeavors have something in common: At the start, you have no clue how you're going to succeed. It can be kind of daunting

to try to raise money and do a climb on top of it. But you'll find that people who are involved in the outdoors have a charitable nature; everyone wants to share the stoke.

**BP What's been surprising?**  
**SR** I didn't expect I would enjoy it so much. I kind of see myself as an SFS lifer.

**DO IT** Need another incentive? Join BACKPACKER editors on a Summit for Someone climb up Wyoming's Grand Teton in 2015. Commit to raising \$4,000, choose from four dates between July 17 and 25, then sign up for the trip of a lifetime. New this year: A special women-only climb. For details, go to [backpacker.com/sfs](http://backpacker.com/sfs).

NO.

# 58

# Go Solo.

SEE THE WILDERNESS (AND YOURSELF) IN A NEW WAY: ALL ALONE.

by Mark Jenkins

for five days, and then amputated his right forearm to escape, going solo has gotten a bad rap. When his story comes up in conversation, someone inevitably proclaims that "Ralston was an idiot. Going alone is stupid." Such a person is someone who should not go alone into the wilderness.

Ralston's mistake, if he made one at all, was not that he went alone, but that he failed to leave word with someone of his likely whereabouts. I have gone out alone and told no one where I was going too many times to count.

Is this behavior really reckless and irresponsible? There was once a time when exploring the backcountry by yourself was seen as a primary path to understanding topography, both geographical and psychological. Our most cherished wilderness heroes—Thoreau

and Muir, Leopold and Abbey—frequently went on solo adventures.

Can you imagine free-spirited Muir leaving precise notes about where he planned to wander? In *Walden*, Thoreau's manifesto about humankind's relationship to nature, he writes, "I find it wholesome to be alone the greater part of the time. I never found the companion that was so companionable as solitude." Leopold spent weeks alone on horseback in New Mexico's Gila wilderness without a second thought. And Abbey! He would have pissed on a personal locator beacon.

What's happened in the last few decades? It feels as if the weight of technology has ironically pushed us back into the Dark Ages, when the wilds were believed to be so treacherous and malevolent that they could not be assailed alone. The modern mantra is you must go with a partner, or better yet, a group.

But does that really get you where you want to be?

"Distrusting our capacity to be alone, we too quickly look to others to save us, often from ourselves," writes Sarvananda in *Solitude and Loneliness: A Buddhist View*. This seems to me to be a clarifying description of our hyper-social age. Simple as it sounds, to actually know yourself you must sometimes be by yourself.

tactic worked and I gradually zigzagged across the lake. However, on the far side I discovered I was stranded on the ice thanks to a crescent strip of open water separating me from the shoreline.

Going back the way I came was unacceptable. I'd made too many desperate leaps. I searched left and right, eventually finding a crust of ice that bridged over to the talus. It was clearly too thin to walk on, so I laid down on my stomach, dispersing my weight, and used the pick of my ice axe—stretched out in front of me with both hands—to pull myself forward.

This awkward, horizontal maneuver got me within 5 feet of shore before I heard a dreadful cracking sound and felt a shudder in the ice that went straight up into my guts. I had the briefest moment to contemplate my fate before I fell through the ice.

**EVER SINCE ARON RALSTON** got himself caught between a rock and a hard place in Utah's Blue John Canyon, hung there

→ I RECENTLY WENT hiking in the Medicine Bow Mountains, near my home in Wyoming. Alone. I brought no cell phone or sat phone or locator beacon, and told no one, not even my wife, where I was going. I slipped out of the house at 4 a.m., listened to the BBC while driving up to 11,000 feet, then set off on a 7-mile circuit that included two summits. At this elevation, in June, the landscape was still buried beneath a thick plate of snow, which made cross-country travel—at least early on a cold morning—easy and direct.

When I arrived at a high lake I had planned to cut straight across, I found it only partially frozen. Long blue leads of meltwater sliced across the white ice like crevasses. Nonetheless, I thought I could see a way to the distant shore. I stepped onto the ice and crunched out to the first lead, then turned right, tiptoeing along its edge until it narrowed enough for me to jump to the next jigsaw piece of ice. If I questioned the wisdom of proceeding like this alone, I don't recall it. The

No. 59

Read the classics: [backpacker.com/bestbooks](http://backpacker.com/bestbooks).



## NO. 60-63 HEAR THIS.

### Bugling Elk

You won't believe this sound comes out of that animal until you hear it for yourself.

Where **Rockies and west**

Time of day **Sunrise to midmorning and late afternoon to sundown.**

Time of year **September and October**

Terrain **Meadows**

Best hike **Tonahutu Loop in Rocky Mountain National Park, CO (bit.do/0115Tonahutu)**

### Howling Gray Wolf

Let this chorus of baleful echoes send chills down your spine.

Where **Northern MN, WI, and MI; spotty in the West (but usually north)**

Time of day **Nightfall**

Time of year **Year-round (winter is best in Yellowstone, late summer is best in Minnesota)**

Terrain **Valleys abutting forests**

Best hike **McCargoe Cove to Rock Harbor in Isle Royale National Park, MI (bit.do/0115McCargoe)**

### Rattling

#### Rattlesnake

We don't recommend actually seeking this out, but we guarantee it will be memorable. Back away slowly.

Where **Almost everywhere**

Time of day **All day**

Time of year **Year-round in temps above 60°F (most active in 80-90°F)**

Terrain **Almost everywhere; check reptileknowledge.com.**

“Best” hike **Gila**

**Crest South in Gila National Forest, NM (bit.do/0115Gila)**

### Battling Painted Buntings

Listen to this birdsong competition as males vie for females.

Where **South and the Atlantic Coast**

Time of day **Dawn to midmorning or late afternoon**

Time of year **Late March to late August**

Terrain **Thick underbrush**

Best hike **Ray**

**Roberts Greenbelt Hike in Clear Creek National Heritage Center, TX (bit.do/0115RayRoberts)**

back in your head.

In the event, as I was going under I was simultaneously flailing valiantly with my ice axe. The pick happened to stick into a sizable block of ice and I managed to drag myself out of the freezing black water with remarkable alacrity. My head didn't even go under. I scrambled to shore, leapt to my feet, and shook like a dog. I was surprised to find myself no worse for wear other than being thoroughly soaked and cold. Very cold. Both the air and the water temperature were barely above freezing. The thought of hypothermia (a miserable, self-inflicted condition I've had many times) flashed through my mind and briefly made me feel stupid for not having simply walked around the lake. What a silly way to go! But then, thankfully, my rational self spoke up: *Deal. Don't whine.*

With nothing but snow and rock for miles, building a fire was out of the question. And with no lovely lass with whom to strip naked, slip into a sleeping bag, and get deliciously rewarmed flesh-to-flesh (an obvious point against going solo, it must be said), my options were limited. I peeled off my gaiters, unlaced my boots, ripped off my pants, emptied the water out of my boots, wrung out my socks, wrung out my pants, and put them all back on in a matter of minutes. Then I struck off up the mountain at a pace so hellish it was certain to pump warm blood through my entire body.

Boot-kicking and swinging my ice axe rhythmically and ceaselessly, I ascended a 1,000-foot couloir in 20 minutes. By the time I reached the top my body was throwing off heat like a steam engine. My clothes? Dry.

Standing on the summit of this insignificant little mountain, I was glad that I'd left no word of my plans, that no one on earth knew my whereabouts. Had I told someone where I was going, there would have been a tether. Without it, I was free! It was just me and the mountain. Flesh and granite, ice and sky. Between my brush with hypothermia and the fast ascent and the knowledge that I was utterly alone, I felt so invigorated my heart almost lifted me off the ground.

Was it reckless to keep going upward in wet clothes in freezing temps? Would I have suffered Ralston-level ridicule if another accident had struck and I'd left myself

no margin for safety? Probably. But I felt confident in my assessment of the conditions and my experience. Which brings up a critical component of smart solo travel: Know your limits. Without companions, you must think for yourself, make decisions for yourself, and be willing to bear the consequences on your own. You must know your abilities well enough to separate acceptable challenge from dangerous folly. This requires an internal truthfulness not often demanded of us in modern life. On your own in the wild, the threat of serious consequences sharpens the experience and intensifies decision-making. You become your only safety net; there is no plan B.

Everyone has to assess his or her own comfort level with the risk of going alone—and we should avoid condemning others' judgment.

In Yosemite a few years ago, I interviewed Alex Honnold after his barrier-breaking free solo (alone, no rope) ascent of Half Dome.

“Technically, you should be able to free solo anything you can lead well with a rope,” he told me. “The moves are exactly the same; it’s all a matter of the strength of your mind.” The fact that Honnold is the only person in the world who thinks it’s wise to climb a sheer 2,000-foot stone face without a safety net doesn’t mean he’s reckless, it simply underscores the vast range of human ability. For a hiker of moderate experience, backpacking alone for several days may be just as challenging, and rewarding, as a free solo ascent is to Honnold.

But can you encounter unexpected obstacles on even the “safest” itinerary? I certainly hope so. Obstacles are your opportunities to prove your resourcefulness, your equanimity, and your resolve. As the 1st century Stoic philosopher Epictetus sagaciously put it, “Circumstances don’t make the man, they only reveal him to himself.”

**BEYOND SOLITUDE** and challenge, there are other legitimate reasons for solo backcountry travel that offset the potential risks. How often have you wanted to do an adventure but lacked a partner? How often have you planned something great and then had a partner pull out at the last minute? How often have you had a partner say she’d pick you up at 3 a.m., but then call at 9 a.m.



moaning that she overslept? Once you quit counting on other people to make your trip work out, you're emancipated. You want to go? Damn it, just go!

On your own, you go at your own pace. You want to run, by God run. You want to stop and take photographs, hell, do it. You want to kneel and examine every frigging flower, go for it. Doing something alone is the birthright of every human, and going solo into the wilderness turns out to be—not surprisingly, since we were once of the wilderness—one of the most primeval and empowering opportunities 21st-century humans can experience.

But. There's always a "but," and this is a big one: Hiker, know thyself. And know the hazards. If you don't have sufficient skills and knowledge for solo travel, go with someone who does, and learn. And even for experienced hikers, some situations and places pose unusual dangers. As much as I'd like to just state baldly, "Go solo!," and leave it at that, the world is messy and such a decree would be overreaching. There are limits. I'm saddened that solo travelers—especially women—face human threats in remote but crowded places (Nepal, Africa, the AT). And moving through grizzly country I've found much less stressful with a companion. More than once I've had to scare off a curious or furious griz by banding together with my partner to appear big. Whether the danger is human or wild, the benefits of solitude won't come easily if you fear for your safety.

Also, in my experience, long solo journeys simply aren't as much fun alone as they are with a companion (though one could argue this means I just haven't spent enough time by myself yet). Most of us are social animals, and after a few days or weeks alone, we desire human contact.

Ultimately, of course, you can never know for sure if going alone is the right call. The wilderness is just not that predictable. I once soloed the Sheila Face of 12,316-foot Mt. Cook, the highest peak in New Zealand. To get to the Empress Hut near the base of the face, I had to traverse the Hooker Glacier, leaping one mortal crevasse after another without partner or rope. The next morning, the climb itself went well, but on the summit I realized I'd screwed myself. I couldn't downclimb what I'd ascended—it turned out to be too technical—and every other descent route involved passing over enormous glaciers riven with crevasses. I'd forded the Rubicon alone and there was no way back.

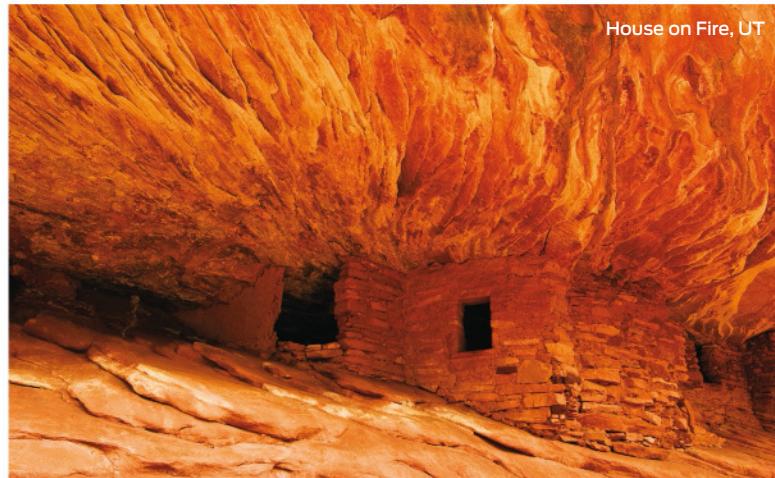
I sat on the summit for a long time, eating my lunch, drinking my water, trying to figure a way out of my predicament, fearing that I'd crossed the line



HALL  
OF  
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House on Fire, UT

## #65: HIKE TO BACKCOUNTRY RUINS.

To get you started, we rounded up three spots cool enough to make Indiana Jones reach for his boots. But remember: Look, don't touch.

### Towel Creek, Coconino NF, AZ

Hike past stately buttes, fields of Indian paintbrush (blooming all summer) and gold lichen splashed across red volcanic rock on this 13.5-mile out-and-back to 700-year-old Verde Hohokam cliff dwellings. A dozen rock-and-mud rooms in near-perfect condition nestle under tuff-rock ceilings. Begin at the Towel Creek trailhead, 65 miles south of Flagstaff, and climb the faint trail for .2 mile to an old Jeep track. At mile 6.2, just past an old electric fence, bushwhack north .3 mile to the ruins. Watch out for guano—hundreds of bats live in these dark alcoves. Info [bit.ly/TowelCreek](http://bit.ly/TowelCreek)

### Painted Cave Bandelier National Monument, NM

Reach some of the ancient Pueblo tribe's most vivid pictographs on this 21-mile out-and-back through steep-walled canyons. From the Frijoles Canyon Visitor Center, 45 miles from Santa Fe, hike up the west edge of Frijoles to Alamo then Capulin Canyons. Camp at mile 8 in Capulin (a creek provides water). Then continue 2.5 miles south to the Painted Cave, 50 feet above the canyon floor, to see paintings of churches, horses, suns, and geometric patterns, plus a 600-year-old, stone-carved dwelling below the cave. Info [nps.gov/band](http://nps.gov/band)

### Mule Canyon, Cedar Mesa, UT

This part of Utah is teeming with ancestral Puebloan remnants, including the famous House on Fire, named for the patterned sandstone that creates an illusion of flames shooting through its ceiling. Grab your photo, then push past the highlight at mile 1.3 for more solitude at the secluded kivas, homes, and granaries that litter the canyon. From the trailhead off of UT 95, about 20 miles west of Blanding, hike northwest. You can go as far as 4 miles in, keeping your eyes open for ruins all the way; find seasonal water along the canyon bottom. Info [bit.ly/CedarMesa](http://bit.ly/CedarMesa)

► CONTINUED ON PAGE 46



from reasonable challenge to reckless risk.

Then a savior arrived: a Kiwi guide with client in tow. He was thrilled to have a third person on the rope, protecting both himself and his client (not to mention, me) through the treacherous ice fields. We descended the Linda Glacier, sneaking across delicate snow bridges and jumping yawning crevasses, arriving without mishap at the Plateau Hut after dropping 5,000 feet in five hours. Needless to say, I was grateful for the help.

Which raises one more point in favor of solo travel: Going alone, it turns out, is sometimes the best way to appreciate having partners. ■

*Mark Jenkins wrote about Steve Brumbach's quest to hike in all 439 USFS wilderness areas in the September 2014 issue.*



## SAFETY WITHOUT NUMBERS

### KEY TIPS FOR SOLO HIKERS

#### 1. Pack wisely.

Decide which extras to bring—like a sleeping bag or bivy sack on a long dayhike—by weighing the consequences of not having it against the burden of carrying too

much. Always carry a signaling or communication device.

#### 2. Be realistic about your abilities.

Stay within comfortable limits for mileage, elevation gain, navigational challenges, and technical skills. Choose a familiar trail for your first solo. Err on the side of caution.

#### 3. Consider the consequences.

Before taking even rou-

tine risks (like crossing a moderately challenging stream), evaluate the potential dangers. Never rule out an alternative route or simply retreating.

#### 4. Leave word.

The author's preferences notwithstanding, you should give your itinerary—including emergency routes—to a friend or family member, with clear instructions on who to contact if you fail to return on time.

READERS'  
CHOICE

## NOs. 66-69: On Your List

**Waterton to Kintla Lake via Hole in the Wall, Glacier National Park, MT** "Why? 1. Because it's Glacier. 2. At Hole in the Wall, you feel like you're being cradled in the arms of Mother Earth." —Alyson Browett, Linden, VA

► **Olympic National Park, WA** "Hike the coast to the western-most point in the Lower 48." —Peter M. Torassa, Jr., Salem, OR ► **Teton Crest Trail, Grand Teton National Park, WY** "For its challenges—and more-rewarding payoffs." —Candace Whitten, Denver, CO ► **The Wonderland Trail, Mt. Rainier National Park, WA** "Nothing else packs so much beauty, variety, and thigh burn into 93 miles." —David Kuhns, Tumwater, WA

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**OSPREY**



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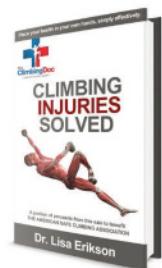
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» <b>TUESDAY, DECEMBER 2</b>	3:00 PM	Subaru National HQ	2235 West Mariton Pike	Cherry Hill, NJ
» <b>THURSDAY, DECEMBER 4</b>	6:30 PM	EMS - Westside	2152 Broadway	New York, NY
» <b>FRIDAY, DECEMBER 5</b>	7:00 PM	CampMor	810 N State Rt 17	Paramus, NJ
» <b>SATURDAY, DECEMBER 6</b>	6:30 PM	EMS - Soho	530 Broadway	New York, NY
» <b>MONDAY, DECEMBER 8</b>	7:00 PM	REI	303 Lafayette St	New York, NY
» <b>TUESDAY, DECEMBER 9</b>	7:00 PM	REI	189 Connecticut Ave	Norwalk, CT
» <b>THURSDAY, DECEMBER 11</b>	6:30 PM	REI	22 Chapel View Blvd.	Cranston, RI
» <b>FRIDAY, DECEMBER 12</b>	6:30 PM	REI	279 Salem St	Reading, MA
» <b>SATURDAY, DECEMBER 13</b>	6:00 PM	EMS	87 Marginal Way	Portland, ME
» <b>MONDAY, DECEMBER 15</b>	6:00 PM	The Ski Rack	85 Main Street	Burlington, VT
» <b>TUESDAY, DECEMBER 16</b>	6:00 PM	Alpine Shop	1184 Williston road	Burlington, VT
» <b>THURSDAY, DECEMBER 18</b>	6:30 PM	Omer and Bobs	20 Hanover St. On the Mall	Lebanon, NH
» <b>SATURDAY, DECEMBER 20</b>	5:00 PM	Base Camp Outfitters	2363 Route 4	Killington, VT
» <b>MONDAY, DECEMBER 29</b>	6:30 PM	Appalachian Outfitters	60 Kendall Park Road	Peninsula, OH
» <b>TUESDAY, DECEMBER 30</b>	6:30 PM	REI	970 W Eisenhower Parkway	Ann Arbor, MI
» <b>SATURDAY, JANUARY 3</b>	6:00 PM	Laacke and Joys	1433 N Water Street	Milwaukee, WI
» <b>TUESDAY, JANUARY 6</b>	6:00 PM	REI	7900 Internationl Dr, Suite 300	Bloomington, MN
» <b>WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 7</b>	6:30 PM	Scheels	1375 S Columbias Road	Grand Forks, ND
» <b>THURSDAY, JANUARY 8</b>	6:30 PM	Scheels	1551 45th Street S	Fargo, ND
» <b>SUNDAY, JANUARY 11</b>	4:00 PM	Jax Outoor Gear	1200 N College Ave	Fort Collins, CO
» <b>MONDAY, JANUARY 12</b>	6:00 PM	Neptune Mountaineering	633 S Broadway	Boulder, CO
» <b>THURSDAY, JANUARY 15</b>	6:30 PM	Rock N Roll Sports	608 Tomichi Ave	Gunnison, CO
» <b>WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 21</b>	7:00 PM	Cripple Creek Backcountry	582 Highway 133	Carbondale, CO
» <b>SUNDAY, JANUARY 25</b>	5:00 PM	Hoback Sports	520 W Broady Ave #3	Jackson Hole, WY

For more information please visit [BACKPACKER.COM/WINTEREDITION](http://BACKPACKER.COM/WINTEREDITION)





# GO NUTS

A life well-hiked includes a few experiences that might push your comfort zone. And yes, you really should splurge on that New Zealand adventure. In the end, completing the ultimate life list should be fun, not easy.

## no. 70 *Go deep in Denali.*

You may find yourself toolin' down the road in Denali, thinking it doesn't get better than this. It does get better, but only if your skills match the big-time, trailless terrain. Access the foothills beyond the flats and enter a land of braided, sky-blue rivers, tundra shaggy with willow, and more wildlife than you shake a can of bear spray at (like these Dall sheep rams near Polychrome Pass). You can't make reservations, but try for units 12 and 13 around Mt. Eielson (free permits required). INFO [nps.gov/dena](http://nps.gov/dena)

PHOTO BY PATRICK ENRIQUES / ALASKASTOCK.COM . TEXT BY CASEY LYONS

053



no. 71  
*Basecamp  
the Bugaboos.*

This slice of British Columbia's Purcell Range is gouged by glaciers, lashed by rain, and skipped by everyone who doesn't think that sounds like heaven. Throw down in Applebee Dome campground after climbing 3,500 feet in 3 miles, with 10,118-foot Snowpatch Spire before you like a drive-in screen. Day trip East Post and Crescent Spires or traverse the glacier (permits required; \$10/person). INFO [bit.ly/1EggreB](http://bit.ly/1EggreB)

054

**MD** BACKBONE MT., 3,360 FT., 2.2 MI. Pack a picnic; there's a table at the top of this easy hike.

**VT** MT. MANSFIELD, 4,393 FT., 2.6 MI. The summit ridge's four peaks resemble a face: Adams Apple (4,060 ft.), Chin (4,393 ft.), Nose (4,062 ft.), and Forehead (3,940 ft.).



PHOTO BY FLORIS VAN BREUGEL; TEXT BY CASEY LYONS





NO.

72

## Get to the Himalayas.

There isn't a mountain range in the world that draws eyes up and jaws down like these beauties, overlapping India, China, Nepal, Bhutan, and Pakistan. The classic trek: Everest Basecamp. En route, you'll spy 21,138-foot Cholatse (pictured), which, in 1982, became the last named peak in the Khumbu region to be climbed. **INFO** [backpacker.com/everest](http://backpacker.com/everest)

056

CT

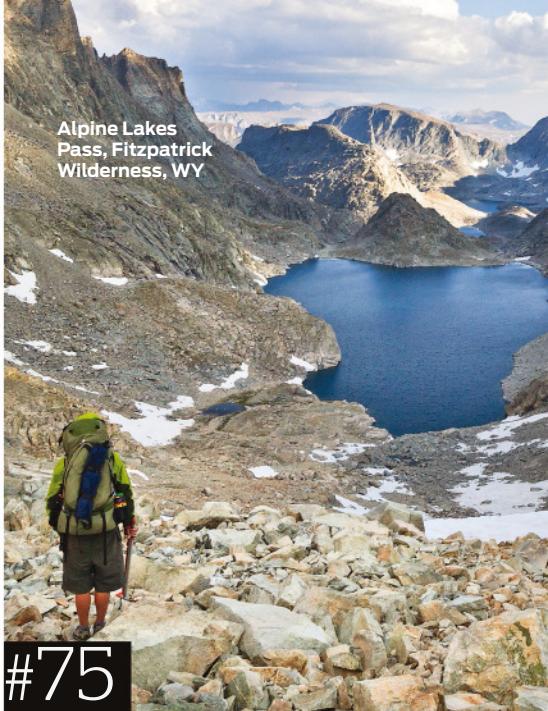
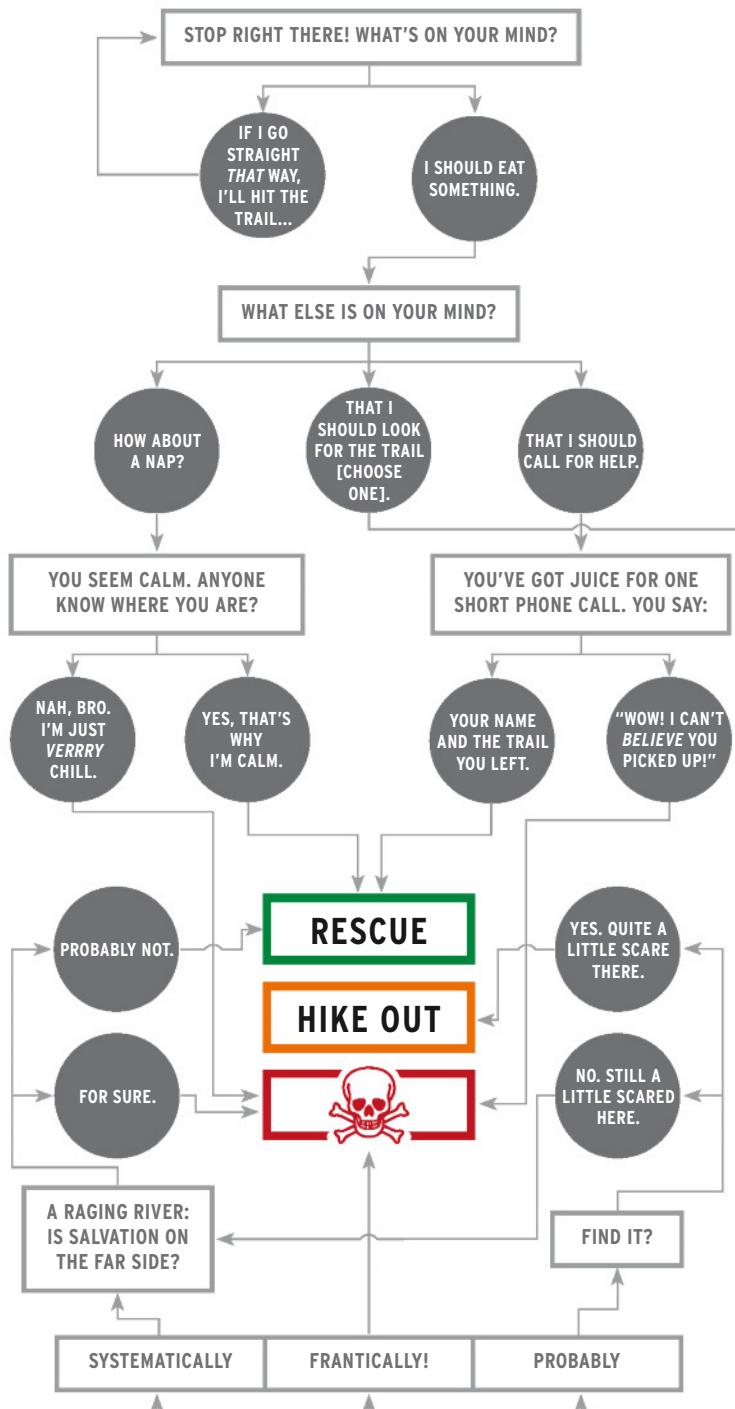
MT. FRISSELL-SOUTH SLOPE, 2,380 FT., 2.6 MI. This is one of three state high points that are not technically on the summit of a hill or mountain.

SD HARNEY PEAK, 7,242 FT., 7 MI. Take in the view from an old stone fire tower.

PHOTOS BY (CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT) PATITUCCI PHOTO; AARON KRAFT; COURTESY, TEXT BY DENNIS LEWON

# NO.73: GET FOUND.

Don't be ashamed: Everyone gets lost. (No? See page 25.) What matters now is getting out of this mess. How will you do it?



## #75 Go off-trail. Way off-trail.

It'd be cute to say the first step off a trail is the hardest one. But it ain't true. Off-trail hiking doesn't really begin until you're miles from the path, out of earshot of other hikers, and in a place where no one would find you. You move more like the wildlife, following drainages and vigilant to terrain traps and signs of danger. And that's when you access it: The spot that you're certain has never seen another boot print. On the map it barely blipped as a tiny drainage or insignificant meadow, but those topo lines hid a paradise. It's wilderness gone raw, the way it should be, and it's hard to get there. And that's part of the reward. The other part? No one else is going to wander into your camp. The first step gets you started, but it's the middle ones that count. —Casey Lyons

### Gear up

Scarpa Kailash

HALL  
OF  
FAME  
GEAR

Get max support, protection, and comfort with the Editors' Choice-winning (2008) Scarpa Kailash (\$209; 3 lbs. 4 oz.; [scarpa.com](http://scarpa.com)). It made our steps mountain-goat sure, even while carrying a 45-pound pack on the sketchiest stretches of the Elk-King Traverse in Oregon.



NO. 74

*Hike Buckskin Gulch, UT/AZ.*  
[backpacker.com/buckskin](http://backpacker.com/buckskin)



# On My List



"Climb all four ridges of the Matterhorn. It may be as clichéd as eating chocolate in Switzerland, but despite six decades of climbing mountains on five continents, I've still never seen anything as beautiful as the Matterhorn. So far I've only managed to climb two of them. How could I possibly let myself die before climbing the others as well?"

—JOHN HARLIN III, AUTHOR OF *EIGER OBSESSION*; HIKE, CLIMBED, BIKE, AND PADDLED THE SWISS BORDER IN 2010-11.



## Cook a Gourmet Meal

Yes, you have to forgo boil-in-a-bag convenience. But you won't regret the effort after eating this five-star spread.

### Salmon Pâté

Apps fit for the frontcountry.  
2-3 servings

#### INGREDIENTS

- 2 oz. dry smoked salmon
- 1 oz. cream cheese
- 1/4 tsp dill
- 1 5.5-oz. package bagel chips

IN CAMP → Mix salmon, dill, and cheese. Smear on chips.

### Red Gnocchi with Bacon

This entrée is high-end eatery good. 2 servings

#### INGREDIENTS

- 2 Tbsp toasted walnuts
- 3 dried figs, quartered

- 1/4 tsp dried basil
- 3 strips bacon
- 1 10-oz. package shelf-stable gnocchi
- 2 inch chunk of a red beet
- 3 Tbsp olive oil
- 1 Tbsp balsamic syrup
- 2 Tbsp grated Pecorino Romano cheese

AT HOME → Toast walnuts at 350°F for 6 minutes. Put in a bowl with figs and basil. Cook bacon over low heat, drain, break into 1-inch chunks, and add to nut mixture. Pack in a zip-top bag. Package other ingredients separately.

IN CAMP → Grate beet into cook pot, fill with water, and boil. Cook gnocchi according to instructions and drain. Divide between bowls, drizzle with oil and toss. Top with nut mix, balsamic, and cheese.

### Tiramisu

Adapt this classic dessert for the backcountry. 3 servings

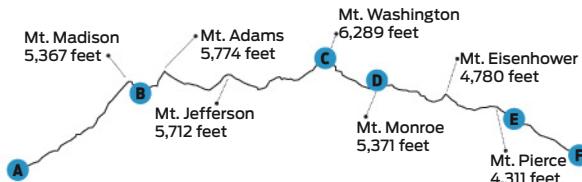
#### INGREDIENTS

- 1/3 cup water
- 2 tsp instant espresso
- 2 Tbsp Kahlua
- 1 3.4-oz. packet instant white chocolate pudding
- 2 cups milk (from powder)
- 16 ladyfingers
- 1 oz. dark chocolate

IN CAMP → Boil water, then add espresso and Kahlua. Mix pudding according to instructions. Layer half the ladyfingers on the bottom of a cook pot, drizzle with half the espresso mixture, and spoon on half the pudding. Repeat for a second layer. Shave dark chocolate over the top.



# REHAB your gear.



## NO.77: PRESI TRAVERSE (NH) IN A DAY

**Distance:** 20.8 miles  
**Elevation gain:** 8,500 feet  
**Time:** ~14 hours

→ Eat a big breakfast and set off from the Appalachian trailhead (A), linking Valley Way and the Watson Path for 3.4 miles and 3,500 feet to the summit of Mt. Madison. Descend to the AMC's Madison Hut (B) for water, coffee, and whatever fresh-baked goodies are leftover from breakfast (bring money). Pick up the Gulfside Trail and watch your step on the rocky spur trail to Mt. Adams's summit. Zip through Edmunds Col (named for a legendary trail builder) and bounce over Mts. Jefferson and Clay (the latter if you're feeling zesty) to join the cog rail line up Mt. Washington. Grab a drink of water and snacks at the summit (C), but don't carry water out. You can fill up 1.5 miles later at Lake of the Clouds Hut (D). Mt. Munroe looks straight up from the hut door, but climb it for the best view in the Presidents (and lower foot traffic than the nearby summits). Hit Mts. Eisenhower and Pierce before reaching the Mitzpah Spring Hut (E),

where you can top off your water supply. Still feeling strong? Add on Mt. Jackson, before stumbling out, after another 3,000 feet of knee-grinding descent, in Crawford Notch (F).

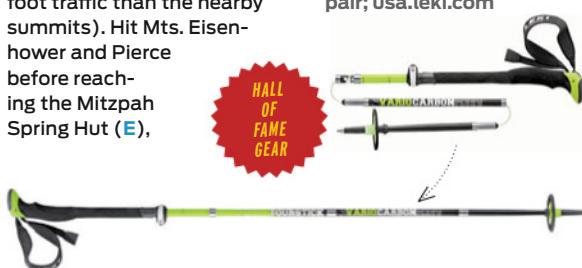
**TRIP PLANNER** Shuttle car 44.195738, -71.388981; 24 miles northwest of North Conway, NH, on US 302 Trailhead 44.371199, -71.289292; 30 miles northeast of your shuttle car on US 2 **Permits** USFS Parking Pass required (\$5). Pick up at AMC Highland Center in Crawford Notch on the way to drop off your shuttle car. **Season** Summer has the longest days; you'll need all that light.

### Gear up

#### Leki TourStick Vario Carbon

With superlight carbon on top and more rugged aluminum on the bottom, the TourStick trekking poles strike a perfect balance. They adjust from 45 to 53 inches and collapse down to 15 inches for easy packing. \$200; 1 lb. 2 oz. per pair; [usa.leki.com](http://usa.leki.com)

HALL  
OF  
FAME  
GEAR



#78

*The Presi not enough beast for your East? Try Devil's Path in the Catskills:  
[backpacker.com/devilspath](http://backpacker.com/devilspath).*

## BEFORE

Dirt and soaked in water ruin the insulation properties of down.



## AFTER

Clean and waterproofed down keeps water out and body heat in.



**Nikwax Down Wash**  
 Cleans effectively while preserving the insulating properties of down.



**Nikwax Down Proof**  
 Adds safe, high performance water repellency to down garments.



**NIKWAX GEAR REHAB**  
 3 step program

**SEND YOUR GEAR TO REHAB.**  
[nikwaxna.com/gr](http://nikwaxna.com/gr)

At Nikwax we do all we can to minimize our impact on the environment and people's health. We are the only established outdoor aftercare company to have a completely WaterBased, non-flammable and fluorocarbon (PFC) free range. We have always avoided using PFCs as we believe they are a risk to consumer health and the environment.





## #79: TRAIN FOR SOMETHING BIG.

→ The Matterhorn. The name is as intimidating as the 14,692-foot pyramid itself. Then there's its history: the last of the major Alps peaks to be climbed (in 1865); killer of 500-plus mountaineers. Scary, right? That's why I found myself



holding 15 feet of half-inch chain and dragging a tractor tire 100 yards at a time, while I sweated like the Swamp Thing. For nearly three months, my coach at Boulder's Alpine Training Center beat the weak out of me with a series of diabolical exercises that made my quads burn and my arms noodly. Yet, with each 70-pound sandbag get-up and 1,000-meter row, I got stronger, recovered faster, and finally, felt ready.

When the trip arrived, we

climbed hard into a narrow weather window. Every pitch I expected to stall with fatigue, but it never came. So when I reached the Ginsu-sharp summit ridge, my first thought wasn't "Victory is mine!" but rather, "Huh, that wasn't so bad." In fact, it looked like we'd be down in plenty of time for lunch. The afternoon beer was one tiny benefit of the training, but making things seem easier, better, and more fun was the real payoff. —Shannon Davis, editor of Climbing

no.

80 Hike 500 miles this year.

## #81: Don't eat.

→ What joker decided to call it "fasting?" Without the day's normal punctuation, everything seems slow. I stay in my sleeping bag as the sun crests the canyon rim, tightening and relaxing each muscle, letting my mind meander. ¶ Today is a day for absences: I'm not going anywhere, not seeing anyone, not eating anything. The 40-hour "solo" may be the capstone of my semester-long NOLS course, but I've been imagining such a release for a long time. ¶ Fasting is key to the experience. It's a tribute to will, intention, control—that's why most major religions prescribe it, why John Muir swore by it. "Fasting cleanses the soul, raises the mind," wrote St. Augustine 1,600 years ago. It tells my whole being, down to my cells, that today is different from other days. ¶ And it is. Without the scaffolding of habit and movement, I'm free to inspect thoughts that have been poking me for days, years. Ideas that are too big or too delicate for the stampede of daily life, the ones that hide in the tiny spaces between other thoughts, today is for them. I unpack them and inspect their little textures in the canyon's museum stillness. Nothing is solved here, but solutions aren't the point. Clarity and quiet are what matters. And when the sun comes up again and it's finally time for breakfast, you can be sure I'll savor every single bite. —Rachel Zurer

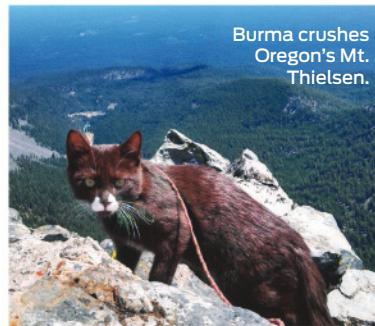
## On My List



"Every time I do something—like climb a big peak—I see five things I want to add. My current bucket list includes climbing the 50 high points in the United States in 50 days with a good friend. There are about 100 things I want to see on that trip and 100 more I want to do."

—MELISSA ARNOT, MOUNTAIN GUIDE, FIVE-TIME EVEREST SUMMITER

## #82: HIKE WITH YOUR CAT.



Burma crushes Oregon's Mt. Thielsen.

Really. Army veteran Stephen Simmons has taken his 2-year-old cat Burma on hundreds of back-country adventures, including up Mt. Shasta. Here are his tips for following in their pawprints.

► Start 'em young. Find a

friendly, confident kitten; expose him to frequent travel. "If a cat grows up on the go, he can learn to be comfortable anywhere," Simmons says.

► Keep 'em safe. Predators abound. Burma wears a radio transmitter collar

while he hikes, sleeps in a carrier near Simmons at night, and explores camp on a 6-foot length of p-cord for easy retrieval.

► Be realistic. "If you want to get from A to B, you'll probably have to carry him a lot," Simmons

explains. "Save the wandering for camp." Burma rides in a soft-sided carrier attached to the top of Simmons's pack with carabiners.

For more tips and photos from Burma's travels, go to [backpacker.com/cathike](http://backpacker.com/cathike).



# NO. 83

THE BAD NEWS: You can only try. The 61-year-old started guiding Rainier in 1975 and, with 512 ascents, he's its undisputed king. Most epic alpine moment? Descending Everest in '87. Dunn was in a seated belay when his partner fell past him, ripping their only piece of protection from the 7,000-foot, 60-degree Great Couloir. Dunn leaned back, dug his heels in, and caught him, saving both of their lives.

## B E A S

## B A D A S S

## A S G E O R G E

## D U N N.

### 84: Build a Snow Cave.

to know that in the direst of conditions you can come up with something that will work," Dunn says. ► **Face facts.** "In midwinter, I was descending from Rainier's Camp Muir. By the time we got to Pebble Creek the wind was blowing 100 mph—it ripped the lens right out of my goggles. Two clients couldn't crawl any farther. They had given up the will to live. It was time." ► **Shelter in place.** You need two things to make snow caves easy: deep snow and sloping terrain (30 to 50 degrees, ideally). Look for a wind roll on the lee side of a slope, where the snow is deeper, and shovel the snow downhill so it rolls out of your way. ► **Shovels ready.** You can't move snow quickly with a spoon or a pot lid. Pack a shovel with a tempered aluminum head and an extendable handle. ► **Fast and furious.** Divide into two teams of two, start tunneling about 8 feet apart, and work to meet in the middle as fast as possible. Have one person dig all-out for two minutes, then switch. This prevents overheating (from the effort) or hypothermia (while waiting). ► **Size matters.** Create a space just large enough to accommodate your group when squatting. Leave the roof 3 feet thick for proper strength and slope it to prevent drips. ► **Seal it off.** Wall off the entrances with snow blocks from the debris pile. Dig a small weasel hole (big enough to crawl through) underneath one sealed entrance. Make this tunnel lower than the floor so it blocks wind and blowing snow. If cooking, unblock a door. ► **Huddle up.** Sit on your packs for warmth and wait. It's going to be a long night.

→ You don't get to be King of Rainier without learning a few things along the way. Snow caves, with their total weather protection, are one of the most important. "It's a really good feeling



# NO. 86 HIKE FOR 24 HOURS (OR MORE!).

no. 85

## Cross Maine's 100 Mile Wilderness.

→3 a.m. Misty, murky, barely 40°F with the dank scent of snow on the wind. From a West Virginia trail padded with birch leaves, a swarm of butterflies flutters into the beam of my headlamp. I ease my aching legs to a stop, mesmerized by the choreography. ¶ The wings of a hundred golden monarchs dance in the flickering light, orange-veined, claret-edged, bobbing and weaving like tropical fish. The throbbing in my IT band fades. The blister on my heel stops weeping. ¶ After 37 hours on the move, the moment has arrived—the one I've experienced on more than a dozen 24-plus-hour hikes and the one that keeps me planning more no-sleep epics (next up: a remote Grand Canyon loop in May). ¶ It is the moment of release, when muscles stretched well beyond exhaustion click into autopilot and my mind uncouples to wander where it will, away from workaday concerns and the physical feedback that often dominates shorter walks. ¶ I hike absurdly long distances in a single stretch because fatigue brings a

freedom I can't find anywhere else. Call it a hiker's hypnosis, a chemical-free bridge to a world of bright colors, untethered meditation, and—sometimes, if you're lucky—a brilliant swirl of butterflies. ¶ Or call it crazy. My partner's voice breaks my reverie, and the monarchs float back down to earth, a hundred birch leaves momentarily animated by a stiff West Virginia breeze.

—Jonathan Dorn

### ► Gear up

#### Honey Stinger Waffles

All-day energy meets brain-pleasing flavor. These little guys pack 130 calories into a moist, chewy treat you won't get sick of. \$22 for a 16 pack; [honeystinger.com](http://honeystinger.com)



READERS'  
CHOICE

### NOS. 87-89 Local Life List

► **Emigrant Wilderness, CA** [Find](#) classic Yosemite scenery, without the crowds, says Paul Wagner, of Napa, California. For a true backcountry experience, he says, get off-trail onto bare granite and explore Pingree and Yellowhammer Lakes.

► **The Ozark Trail, MO** This 350-mile footpath traverses the state's southeast forest. Mark Nettles, of Chesterfield, Missouri, recently finished it. His pick: the Current River section. "You'll see elk, deep blue springs, rivers, and hike through hollows," he says.

► **Camel's Hump, VT** Tackle this tundra-topped summit via the Long Trail. "It's the tallest undeveloped mountain in the state, and when the leaves change, it has one of the most amazing views around," says Laura Fleming, of Winooski, Vermont.

# On My List



Who can settle for just one? Hiking across Iceland, backpacking across the Highlands of Scotland, and thru-hiking the 800-mile Hayduke Trail in Arizona and Utah. I'm also working on completing the highest 100 peaks in the state of Washington.

—HEATHER "ANISH" ANDERSON, HOLDER OF THE SELF-SUPPORTED SPEED RECORD ON THE PACIFIC CREST TRAIL

**#90: Make fire without matches—the gold standard of outdoor acumen. Learn to conjure flames at [backpacker.com/makefire](http://backpacker.com/makefire).**

NO.  
**91**

# Traverse a glacier.\*

Explore a frozen fantasy world, but be prepared for unique hazards. Tony Tsuboi, mountaineering instructor at The Everett Mountaineers in Washington, describes what to look for.

## Crevasse

These fissures are mesmerizing to behold, deadly to fall into. In spring and early summer, they're often concealed by snow bridges. As the weather warms, the bridges melt, eventually exposing the crevasses. In between, they can be exceptionally dangerous—hidden from view by a layer of snow too thin to hold a hiker's weight. (Caution: You can fall into one anytime, regardless of season.) Travel on a rope team of three or more. In the Pacific Northwest, Tsuboi prefers glacier travel in mid- to late spring. "The weather is less reliable," he says, "but the bridges are more stable."

## Moraine

Hike atop this glacial feature—an accumulation of debris like rocks and dirt—to skirt crevasse danger. But the transition from moraine to glacier can be hazardous. First, the slope tends to be steep—often as steep as possible before the slope releases—and littered with loose rocks. Second, you might encounter a "moat" between the moraine and glacier, where the ice pulls away from the rocks and leaves a dangerous gap.

## Moulin

Think of these sinkholes as part of a glacier's plumbing system, transporting meltwater from the surface down into the glacier's underbelly. But on the surface, flowing water means slick glacial ice. Slip here, and you can easily be pulled into the moulin by the water's force. Avoid running water and wet ice—and wear crampons.

## Boulders

Random large boulders, spread over the glacier like this, indicate a path where rockfall is a hazard. Avoid areas with rockfall, especially in warmer weather, when rocks tend to fall. Wear a helmet.

## Whiteout

Always keep an eye on the weather (best bet for glacier travel: clear, high pressure systems). Whiteouts can descend quickly in the mountains; you should be skilled enough to navigate around in low or no visibility.



## #92

### SEE THE OCEAN CATCH FIRE.

→Liquid lightning. That's what it looks like every time my paddle dips into Mexico's Sea of Cortez. I'm kayaking on a moonless night off Baja's Isla Carmen, and the bioluminescent plankton have reached an intensity that looks almost fake. Think fireflies of the sea, times a million, whenever something agitates the water. And when I jump in with mask and snorkel, I see the water explode.

There are plenty of reasons that sea kayaking in Baja belongs on anyone's life list—rugged islands, soft beaches, whales, turquoise water—but going during a peak bioluminescent plankton bloom elevates the experience to the top of the list.

The catch? While bioluminescence occurs in oceans worldwide, the level of intensity is unpredictable, and the most fantastic displays are fleeting. Schedule your trip for a new moon, as the dark nights enhance your ability to see the phenomenon. And go often. —Dennis Lewon

**DO IT** Allow six days to tour Islas Carmen and Danzante in Loreto Bay National Marine Park. **Season** Spring and fall. **Guide** Sea Kayak Adventures (starting at \$1,095/person; [seaakadventures.com](http://seaakadventures.com))



## #93: Catch a golden trout.

Golden trout only live in pristine, low-traffic, alpine lakes and streams. That's our kind of fish. We convinced guides in three regions to spill their top spots for landing one of these elusive, golden-bellied beauties.

### Sierra Range, CA

►Golden trout are native to California. Find them on their home turf at Lake Italy, 12,350 feet high in the John Muir Wilderness. Take the Pine Creek-Lake Italy Trail for 11 miles, gaining 6,000 feet, into rock-rimmed Granite Park. Dip a fly here, or continue over Italy Pass on rough trail to Lake Italy (free permits required for overnights; pick up at the White Mountain Ranger Station in Bishop). **GUIDE** Kern River Fly Fishing, [kernriverflyfishing.com](http://kernriverflyfishing.com)

### Rockies, CO

►A 2.5-mile (one-way) hike past mining ruins and tundra delivers anglers to Pomeroy Lakes.

Nestled in the shadow of 13,151-foot Pomeroy Mountain in central Colorado, these clear ponds deliver the goods. "Use sinking orange, tan, or olive Scud patterns early in the season, and dry flies like the Elk Hair Caddis and Royal Wulff later," says Stuart Andrews, the high-alpine specialist for ArkAnglers **GUIDE** ArkAnglers, [arkanglers.com](http://arkanglers.com)

### Wind River Range, WY

►Titcomb Basin, in the heart of the Winds, is already the kind of place that backpackers dream about. Head to Elbow Lake, a granite-ringed tarn at the end of an 18-mile trek from Elkhart trailhead. Then, simply explore. "I started fishing in the high-alpine here 50 years ago, and I'm still finding undiscovered spots," says fishing

guide George Hunker. **GUIDE** Sweetwater Fishing; [sweetwaterfishing.com](http://sweetwaterfishing.com)

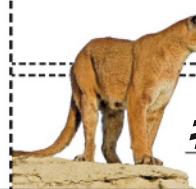
### Gear up

HALL  
OF  
FAME  
GEAR



**The Orvis Superfine Glass 3-weight 7' Fly Rod and Battenkill 1 Reel**

"This rig is my gold standard backcountry rod," says our resident angler. The fiber-glass construction is durable and the action dreamy. "It casts with beautiful accuracy," she says, "blending the soft, slow feel of vintage rods with the precision of modern models. And the ultralight reel issues a satisfying click as fish take out line." \$578 for the whole shebang; 5 oz.; [orvis.com](http://orvis.com)



## #94: See a mountain lion.

**NO.**  
**95**  
**LEAD**  
**A**  
**GROUP**  
**TRIP.**

**1. Pick the right objective.** Save the epic climb for another time. Instead, plan for everyone to learn something and have fun.  
**2. Size it right.** Aim for five or fewer people, or else it's hard to keep tabs on morale.

**3. Equality is key.** Some campers will be better mules; others, better cooks. Divide group gear and chores based on aptitude.  
**4. Establish your leadership.** Don't just bark orders; explaining why you're doing something

gets others involved in decision making.  
**5. Check in often.** Ask: Are you having fun? What are you struggling with? Adjust loads and responsibilities accordingly.  
**6. Let them fail... sometimes.** In low-stakes situations

(like pitching tents in fair weather), let newbies make mistakes. Trial and error is a great teacher.  
**7. Don't let them fail... sometimes.** Tiny skills clinics

(e.g. hygiene) will help others feel comfortable.

—Josh Cole,  
Washington program director for Outward Bound's Northwest School



# TRAILHEAD

## WIN THIS GEAR!

Be sure to check out Backpacker's Facebook page in December for a chance to win an Osprey Pack stuffed with some of the hottest Winter gear, even some of Backpacker's recent Editor's Choice Winners! [facebook.com/backpackermag](http://facebook.com/backpackermag)



**LED LENSER®**

## SEE EVERYTHING. DO ANYTHING.

The LED LENSER SEO™ 7R is compact, lightweight and rechargeable: the perfect companion for excursions that extend beyond sundown. With OPTISENSE Technology™, this headlamp saves battery by sensing light levels and auto-adjusting brightness. Drop this in their stocking and trust they'll see and do more, day or night.

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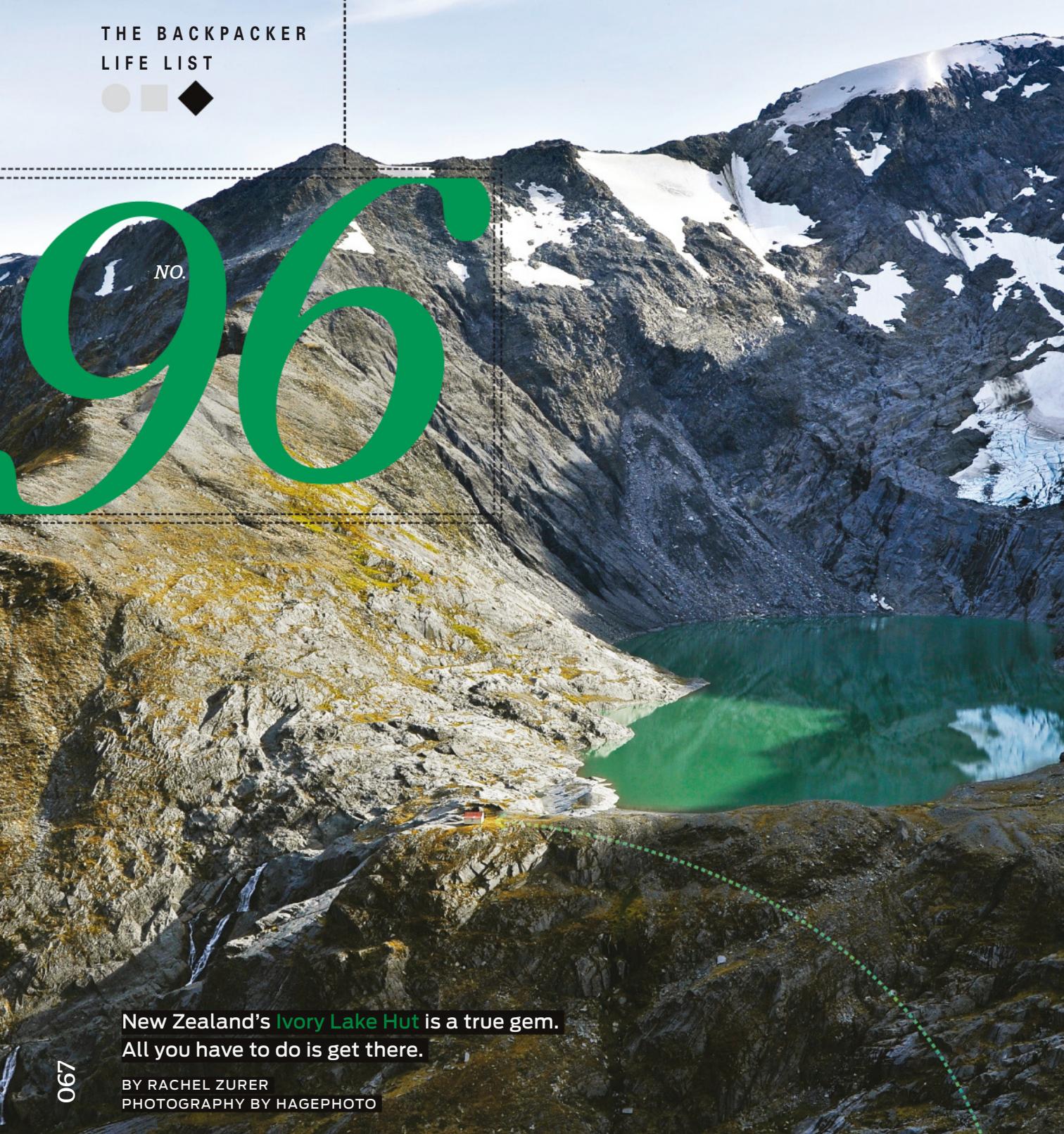
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NO.



New Zealand's **Ivory Lake Hut** is a true gem.  
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067

BY RACHEL ZURER  
PHOTOGRAPHY BY HAGEPHOTO

*Hike to the Best Hut  
in the World* 



**WE ARE HIKING** an hour outside of Hokitika, on New Zealand's famed West Coast, when the vertical jungle slams me on my ass. A cloud of ferns closes in around my knees, obscuring the "trail" beneath. I misjudge a step, slip on a wet root, and my feet shoot forward, friction-free and fast. I thud backward, dislodging an extra rain shower from the dripping foliage and a whiff of something like rotten cabbage. As I stand, I scan my body. Bum ankle? Fine. Knee? Stable and strong. Pride? Deteriorating fast.

Behind me, my companions—an ultrafit pair of American adventure photographers and a sharp-faced Kiwi acting as our unofficial guide—deliver the requisite encouragement. "You've got this!" says Agnes Hage, 31, one of the photogs. "Happens to the best of us," agrees her husband Matt, 41. Andrew Buglass just nods. *Easy for you to say now, I think. We'll see what you're saying when it's dark and I'm still trying to climb this jungle.*

This voice is the fifth member of our entourage, present whenever I feel inferior, but especially vocal on the trail, if I feel I'm holding others back.

From everything I've heard, this hike will be among the hardest I've done in my life, with long distances, lots of elevation change, and treacherous off-trail terrain. And yeah, I'm a bit nervous, but I was spoiling for an unforgettable trip that would push me. I just I hope I didn't plan this route at the expense of my body—or my ego. I seek challenge, but prefer to avoid total collapse. And total collapse in front of strangers? Even at 31 years old, something about the dynamics of hiking in a group can carry me back to the emotional cesspool of middle school. It's enough to make me want to stay down on the ground where I've fallen, crawl up under a bush, and hide.



**THE HIKE TO NEW ZEALAND'S** best hut might be tough, but deciding where to go was surprisingly easy. The country has 900-plus backcountry shelters, ranging from 100-year-old stone shacks to state-of-the-art mini-lodges, in an area the size of Colorado. Shepherds and miners built the first ones, a natural response to quick-changing, unforgiving weather. Later, rabbitters and deer cullers hunting the island's invasive mammals operated out of government-built huts. Those seeds eventually blossomed into a robust network geared mainly toward recreation, which has a reputation as the best hut system in the world. Most Kiwi "tramps" center on one or more of them.

But I didn't just want to visit a good hut: I wanted the best. That meant a postcard-worthy, breathtaking setting: a cozy, intimate shelter with a rich history (nothing decrepit, sterile, or brand-new); and a realistic chance at solitude. Oh, and the hike in had to be worth doing on its own. I read tramping forums, talked to the editor of New Zealand's *Wilderness* magazine, and contacted Shaun Barnett, the author of several tramping guides and a book about the history of the huts. I heard about Syme Hut,

in Egmont National Park on the North Island, perched on the flanks of a dormant volcano with views of the sea. And I had a fleeting interest in the Barker Hut, in Arthur's Pass National Park on the South Island, when I saw a photo of it looking like a little red schoolhouse just below a towering peak. But only one kept recurring everywhere I looked: Ivory Lake Hut.

"One of the coolest hut locations," Barnett said. "It's perched on the shore of a small lake beneath a remnant glacier in the heart of the remote and rugged West Coast mountains on the South Island." Others called it a "holy grail." I learned it was built in the 1970s to help scientists study the small glacier nearby, and a decade's worth of researchers had added countless personal touches during their summers there.

But as soon as I set my sights on getting there, everyone else set theirs on talking me out of it. "I don't think that Ivory Lake Hut is a good idea—it is too difficult an objective," said a different guidebook author I contacted. The tourism bureau thought it "not advisable." Even Barnett backpedaled in an email: "I can't emphasize enough how tough the terrain is, and how much travel in the area is weather-dependent. Even for experienced trekkers, it can be as slow as 1 kilometer per hour and side creeks can easily become impossible to cross during rain. In a few places, you might have to crawl."

"Consider me warned," I wrote back. Sure, the trek sounded like a potential slugfest, but not scary or obviously dangerous. I did have one question, though: "Is it really worth the torture?"

Barnett's reply sealed my resolve: "Yep ... it's one way cool place. If I haven't put you off ... go for it!"

My next step was finding a local to guide me through the off-trail terrain—good map skills can't substitute for deep experience with a foreign ecosystem. I connected with Andrew Buglass via his website, [remotehuts.nz.co](http://remotehuts.nz.co), a repository of status and route information on 63 of the South Island's less popular, more isolated shelters. As soon as I proposed the journey, he agreed to take time off from his job as a mental health counselor to come along. He said he loves any excuse to go wander the mountains—especially those mountains. He grew up in Hokitika, the closest city to our trailhead, and he'd been to Ivory Lake Hut twice before.

We budgeted six nights, and if all went perfectly, expected to reach Ivory Lake on the third day, via two nights at other huts. "The weather is crucial for this trip," Andrew explained as we firmed up our plans. "We need at least two or three fine days to get in and two fine days to get out. That's a big ask for the West Coast"—the area typically receives 9.5 feet of rain per year, and the country's record of 41 inches in 48 hours was set just two valleys over—"but autumn is your best bet for settled weather." We settled on the first week of April, prime time for fall hiking in the Southern hemisphere.



**ON THE DAY BEFORE OUR TREK**, Matt, Agnes, and I arrived at our motel in Hokitika a few hours ahead of Andrew. We bought some topo maps at the local Department of Conservation (DOC) office, and spread them out on the table in the Hages's room. Matt eyed them, estimated distances with his finger, then declared we could get to Ivory Lake in two days. "It'll depend on what Andrew can do, but I bet we could bang this out fast-and-light, American-style," he said conspiratorially. He'd spent a few months tramping around New Zealand before, and hinted that the 56-year-old Andrew might be of the Kiwi Old School—all heavy gear, mutton on spits, and never seeing a hut he didn't want to sleep in, even if meant silly-short days.

"Maybe?" I ventured, not wanting to disappoint Matt a half-hour into our week together, and also flattered by his first impression of me, and also terrified by that same thing. Here's the deal: Despite my job as an editor of this magazine, despite the semester-long NOLS course I completed in college and two years of trail work I did afterward, despite the half-Ironman triathlon I'd finished a few months earlier, I'm still a desk-jockeying weekend warrior, and I've never been anything like fast. In triathlons, swim





races, or 10K runs, I gun for the finisher medal. Individual sports make it easy to embrace the enlightened goal of self-improvement without comparing myself to others. But backpacking in a group is more like a team sport: My performance would directly affect everyone else's experience. Now, Matt had basically declared that we were playing to win. My shoulders tightened.

And so, before our team even came together, we were divided: fast-and-light versus old school; cool kids and dweebs; hares and tortoises. I went back to my room and combed over my gear yet again, looking for anything else to ditch. My pack was slim already, as we weren't carrying tents or pads. But if Matt was expecting fast, I'd need every advantage. I removed a layer, some snacks, a couple magazines, and even a few tea bags.

The next morning, when Andrew came to breakfast in a patched pink-and-blue polypro shirt, a bulging 70-liter pack, and gaiters held together by bailing wire, my heart lifted. *Maybe Matt was right!*



**MATT WAS WRONG.** After hiking just a couple of miles with Andrew, it's clear there's nothing "old school" about the way he moves. He glides upward like a mountain goat, big pack and patched gear be damned.

I, on the other hand, am moving more like an ox. I can't tell which is soaking me faster: the light rain filtering through the canopy, or my own sweat as I trudge forever up the stair-steep path. Our first day is technically on

**Mist threatens to obscure the off-trail route along Dickie Ridge's tussocks (above). The "maintained" track up Dickie Spur requires a lot of high-stepping and jungle-scrambling (left).**

"maintained track;" in practice, this means that every 20 feet we search for the next orange plastic triangle marking our general direction under the rimu and miro trees. Matt and Agnes have disappeared ahead, as it's too dark and wet for good photography, and thus there's no reason for them to stick with me. In true guide fashion, Andrew stays a few steps behind me, letting me set the pace.

*Slow and steady, I tell myself. This isn't a race. And remember, the tortoise won.* Then my 13-year-old self pipes up: *That's just something the sorry-ass tortoises tell themselves to forget they're not good enough.* Kids can be so mean. I focus on the things I can control: I am hydrated; I am not hungry. Though soaked, I am nevertheless warm, thanks to the light, long-sleeve wool shirt Andrew hinted might be a better choice than the synthetic tank and button-down I wore to breakfast. I was miffed at the advice this morning, as if I don't know how to pack. By this afternoon, I'm grateful. "You're doing well," he tells me as I turtle up the 4,000-foot ridge. "A steady engine is the best way."

The only upside of being stuck in the back with Andrew is that it makes for good conversation. I learn he has a degree in botany as he tosses off the Latin names of the exotic plants I wonder about. I hear about his 14-year-old daughter who would

NO. **97**

*Thru-hike a long trail.*



rather play video games than hike. ("So it goes," he says.) And he explains how he worked with a web-savvy friend to start his Remote Huts website back in 2003, when the DOC was threatening to remove several of the huts he loved. Since then, it's grown into the definitive resource on hard-to-access huts, and a hub for community volunteer groups who maintain some of them (none of his key huts were removed). He's a modest, quiet, unlikely leader, but his slow-burning passion for the wildest parts of the island still comes through.

Finally, three hours and about 5 miles later, we pop out onto a high, grassy ridge. The trail is easier to follow up among the golden, knee-high tussock grass. But I'm feeling, to use Andrew's word, "knackered." At last, a small beige hut emerges from the mist. I've seen bigger garden sheds, but after a full day of pruney fingers and squelchy boots, I race inside and strip off my soggy layers. I immediately appreciate why the Kiwis love their huts. Like all the shelters on our route, this one has bunk beds with foam mattresses, a table, and access to nearby water, but no stoves or other amenities, besides the oddities left by other hikers. Yet, thanks to the little four-bunker with its roof and walls, I have nothing more to worry about besides picking which meal to rehydrate for dinner.

At least for tonight. Matt's talking big again about pushing all the way to Ivory Lake tomorrow. Gloomy weather would force us to stick to Andrew's original plan, descending just a few miles to a hut in the Tuke River Valley. I pop four ibuprofen and massage my aching hip flexors. *Can I keep up? Can I keep going?* When I crawl into my bag and shut my eyes, I secretly hope for rain.



**THE CLOUDS REFUSE** to decide the matter. They dance around all morning, sweeping in close as Andrew dries his socks and heats his coffee over a fire just outside the hut (no mutton in sight), backing away again as we cringe into our soggy layers and wring tiny streams out of our

**The author scrambles up gray, cornflake rock on Dickey Ridge (right). A trio of waterfalls greets hikers as they approach the cliffs below Ivory Lake.**



boot laces. I feel sore and creaky as we pack up, dreading the coming game of catch-up.

But by the time we reach our decision spot, about 30 minutes from the hut, the sun has burned away both the mist and my cobwebs. I can finally see most of the impending terrain. To the west, the Tasman Sea looks like it leads to the edge of the world. The Tuke River Valley climbs to the southeast, hemmed in from the west by cupcake-wrapper Dickie Ridge and on the east by muscular green spurs that thin to the gray wall of Galena Ridge. Ivory Lake sits on the other side of the imposing sawtooth cliffs at the head of the Tuke Valley. I haven't been here long enough to know what quintessential New Zealand scenery looks like, but I can sure understand how everyone falls in love with this place, and why Andrew keeps coming back. Our choice now: drop down into the Tuke to the next-closest hut (our original itinerary, Plan A), which means another 12,000 feet of elevation change between here and Ivory Lake and the risk that a storm could raise stream levels and turn us back, or stay high on Dickie Ridge, past the distant sawtooths, all the way to Ivory today (Matt's ambitious Plan B, which would certainly make for better scenery).

"I just thought of a third option," Andrew offers. "We could go to a different hut by taking Dickie Ridge a ways, then dropping south to the Waitaha Valley. From there, it'd be only three or four hours to Ivory Lake tomorrow, and we could do it even in clag weather."

Everyone looks at me. To the victor goes the spoils, but to the slowpoke goes the route decision.

"You really think I can make it that far?" I ask Andrew.

"It's a lot of up and down," he says. "It'll be a long day. The weather might not hold. But sure, yes, probably. You did great yesterday."

Maybe it's his faith in me, my warmed-up muscles, the sunshine, or maybe all or none of those things, but whatever it is, it helps my confidence.

"Plan C," I announce.



**THE RIDGE WALK**, which began as a series of grassy knolls lolling up and down, has turned rocky and exposed. For a while the clouds threatened to kill our visibility, but now, after lunch, they seem to have stabilized into a bubble bath of mist below us and a ceiling of gray overhead. We're in an enchanted middle zone, reserved for those who dare to stay high. Once in a while, over our shoulders, we can see 12,316-foot Mt. Cook, the country's highest peak, 60 miles away. The walk has been tiring so far, but also surprisingly fun. Matt and Agnes stop often to snap photos, which evens out our pace more than yesterday. And now, as we face our toughest obstacle yet, I have reason to reconsider my weakest-link status.

"This is effed," Matt says, staring down to a foot-wide, knife-edge saddle at the bottom of a 30-foot, super-steep rock chimney. On either side, deep gullies drop away in near-vertical slopes. Andrew and I have already navigated our way to the other side, where we stand waiting for Matt and Agnes. I'd managed to pass the exposed, fourth-class spot in less time than it's taking the photographers—who are experienced climbers and mountaineers—to get started.

As I stand spectating from across the abyss, I'm filled with pride that I'm finally better at something than the Hages. Not that I like feeling good at their expense (I blame that same inner 13-year-old), but it's nice that the universe has leveled the playing field. Apparently even a slowpoke can be comfortable with heights.

"That was effed," Matt says again as he and Agnes finally join us on the far side. "That exposure was serious. A no-slip moment for sure."

"I hope that was the tricky notch you remembered," I say to Andrew. He last took this route a decade ago.

"Me too," he says.

It isn't. Over the next few hours, Matt pronounces something "effed" another hundred or so times as we trust our lives to the crumbly cornflake rock. In between the scary spots, we savor the views: The ocean glows beneath the clouds as if lit from within; a four-tiered waterfall slides down Galena Ridge across the valley; and soon a floating citadel of a peak comes into view nearby, looking like a home to the gods themselves. I still struggle to keep up, mostly alone at the back, as Andrew scurries ahead to scout the best route, but it feels different





now. My slow-and-steady mentality is actually an advantage for the exposed bits—I'm able to stay focused and deliberate—and while my pace may not be blazing, it's fast enough, and I'm able to hold it steady as the hours click by.

Finally, we reach the spot on the ridge we've been aiming for. With just three hours of daylight left, there's no discussion of continuing all the way to Ivory; it's too far, across terrain that's potentially even more exposed, and everyone's nerves are raw from the last few hours of gonzo hiking. "It's simple and straightforward down to Top Waitaha Hut from here," Andrew promises. I should know better by now than to think his version of "simple" and "straightforward" means "easy." We descend 3,000 snow-sliding, scree-hopping feet to the Waitaha River Valley. The clouds close around us, and we have to trust that Andrew is leading us

**From top:** The author enjoys the view of 12,316-foot Mt. Cook in the distance during a break on her long traverse of Dickie Ridge. Andrew Buglass demonstrates the Kiwi water filtration technique.



the right way—our maps are useless in the fog. He starts down a near-vertical, jungle-filled gully ("gut," in Kiwi parlance), where the only thing to do is grab the plants tight and let my feet slide, all while trying to avoid our latest vegetal nemesis, a huge, yucca-like speargrass that lurks amid the flax and tussock and stabs like a frightened cat.

I am out of water, and whether because of dehydration or because of exhaustion or because the 13-year-old is back, I start fighting back tears as I lag farther and farther behind. *It feels like every man for himself. I hated holding them back, but now they're abandoning me! I thought I just proved myself, but clearly no one even cares if I'm OK back here...*

Just then the mist parts. There, maybe 200 yards away, an orange-roofed rectangle, larger than last night's hut, sits a quick boulder-hop and river ford away. The relief is instant, and my sadness transforms into giddiness. "I see the hut!" I yell from the back, dancing across the creek.

This one's painted in cheery chartreuse and orange, and we luxuriate in the space of six bunks and the job well done to reach them. We're only 9 miles as the crow flies from our trailhead, but today proved how easy crows have it. The logbook shows that only four groups have stayed here in the past year. The fist of stress in my heart is replaced with excitement about what we've done and what's to come. I've stopped wondering if the trip will be worth it. The adventure, the scenery, the challenge, the variety of terrain—this is already a trip to remember, and we still have five days' worth of food. Ivory Lake Hut could be a shack by a dried-up mudhole, and I wouldn't care.



**THE NEXT DAY**, with nothing to stop us from reaching the hut, we seem to slow, as if to draw out the hike. As we amble across the tussock benches above the Waitaha River, we keep inventing reasons to stop and dawdle. The canyon narrows and deepens as we head upstream, and by early afternoon we reach a spot where waterfalls surround us on three sides. One is rather ordinary, a 10-foot-wide curtain in the middle of a creek, spilling straight down about 15 feet. But the other two are stunners. They tumble in tiers off the blocky, 100-foot cliffs above us, splitting and joining as they negotiate each set of rock-candy protrusions.

Andrew informs us that Ivory Lake sits just above, out of sight because of the steepness of the valley walls. All we have to do is switchback up the cliffs and the hut is ours. But without discussing it, we savor this moment, enjoying the occasional flash of sunlight through the high clouds and marvelling at the good fortune of yet

# NO. 98 MASTER BACKCOUNTRY BREAD

On expeditions, the scent of fresh-baked bread is an unimaginable luxury. Here's how to whip up a loaf.

## Basic Bread

1 packet baker's yeast  
1½ cups water  
2 Tbsp sugar  
2 tsp salt  
3 cups flour  
2 Tbsp vegetable oil

**ACTIVATE THE YEAST.** Add yeast to your warm (110°F) water with salt and sugar and cover. Let sit for a minute.

**MIX.** Add yeast liquid to a gallon-size bag containing your flour and knead for 10 minutes.

**LET IT RISE.** Let the bag sit in a warm (75°F+) environment until dough rises (45 minutes to two hours).

**LET IT RISE AGAIN.** Form a dough ball, and place it in an oiled cook pot. Cover with a bandana and keep it warm for another half hour.

**BAKE.** Put your cook pot over coals, cover, and spoon more coals onto the lid. (No fire? Use a large-burner stove on the lowest possible setting and start a small twiggy fire on top; rotate the pan every five minutes to ensure even cooking.) Bake for 30-50 minutes, resisting the urge to lift the lid. It's done when it smells like bread. Let it sit for a few minutes before slicing or tearing in.

READERS'  
CHOICE

## NOs. 99-101: On Your List

► **Kilimanjaro** "It is a mental and physical challenge because of the altitude, and experiencing the culture of Tanzania is a life-changing experience." —Shawna May, Zionsville, IN

► **Torres del Paine in Chile** "Watching the clouds disperse to reveal the Torres is possibly one of the most magical moments I have ever experienced." —Adele Cunniffe, London

► **Tour du Mont Blanc** "Beautiful landscapes, cute alpine villages, great food, easy sleeping (alpine huts and villages), three countries (France, Switzerland, Italy), absolutely nothing missing." —Carine Edder, San Francisco, CA

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THE NORTH FACE



another dry day. Andrew reclines on the rocks, shirtless, patient, waiting for us to snap our fill of photos.

Eventually, we shoulder our packs again. "You first," Andrew says, as if he's been able to hear the up-and-down turmoil in my head. I lead the way up the final stretch, which feels tame after the exposed scrambling we did yesterday.

It's probably dangerous to carry such high expectations to a place. How often do we glamorize the unknown, only to end up disappointed? Yet, Ivory Lake Hut delivers.

I see the glacier first, a gum-smear of blue looking both ancient and vulnerable, cradled in an amphitheater of gray rock. Next I glimpse the lake, its milky blue surface ruffled by a slight breeze. It looks large enough to be a good challenge to swim across. And then to my left, backed as far away from the lake as possible: There it is.

The towering slopes around us make the hut seem precarious as it clings to gray slickrock slabs on the edge of the 100-foot cliffs we just climbed. Across the narrow Waitaha River gorge, steep slopes spined with green and gray swoop up into the clouds, creating a lavish backdrop for the exterior's weathered red and white paint. It occurs to me that I've never seen a place quite like this spot, with its sampler-platter of high-country tableaus: We're in an alpine cirque, but we can also look down into a steep river canyon, complete with roiling creek and waterfalls, up the valley to a second cirque, and down-valley to rows of veined ridges and peaks.

The hut itself is the same size as last night's six-bunker, about 15 feet across, but a storage room attached

Ivory Lake Hut's charms include an array of seating options and 360 degrees of rugged mountain views to enjoy from them.

to one side gives its roofline a jaunty look, like a seaside shanty. As we approach, I let out a yell of triumph, which echoes off the valley walls. The Hages high-five each other. We open the peeling wooden door and race inside like children eager to explore. The interior is wood-paneled, and, in addition to the usual bunks and mattresses, we find wonders. Old cast-iron pans and kettles. Vials full of what look like tiny insect skeletons. A wooden desk. Best of all, a '60s-era, modish armchair, all right angles and threadbare red fabric. We drag it outside just as the sun breaks through the clouds, and take turns posing for portraits in it as we pass the whiskey.



**WE HAVE EARNED OUR LAYOVER DAY**, and it is glorious. The others head off to climb the primary dayhike target from here, 7,600-foot Park Dome. Without a single pang of self-doubt, I decide to spend the day alone, moving slowly, if at all. I wander down to the creek and up toward the second cirque, and briefly consider pushing toward a pass. But then I think of my aching knees and the long hike out, and decide that after making it to the world's best hut, I'd better spend some time there. On my way back, I strip for a dip in a sun-warmed pool near the lake's outlet stream, then pick my way back half-naked and barefoot.

Thus begins an afternoon of true leisure. I settle into the modish chair and soak up sunbeams and self-satisfaction as I page the last 30 years of hut log books (average annual visiting parties: around 10, including people stopping in on dayhikes from Top Waitaha Hut). I add my name to the list. Then I fall asleep in the sunshine, feeling completely and utterly content.

It's just like Andrew tried to tell me that first day: When passing through such beautiful terrain, there's no better pace than slow. ■

*Senior Editor Rachel Zurer invites you to climb the Grand Teton with her next summer—slowly. Check out [backpacker.com/sfs](http://backpacker.com/sfs) for details and to register.*

 See a slideshow from the journey at [backpacker.com/ivory-lakehut](http://backpacker.com/ivory-lakehut), and experience the best hut in the world in an interactive 360-degree photo in our iPad edition: [backpacker.com/ipad](http://backpacker.com/ipad).

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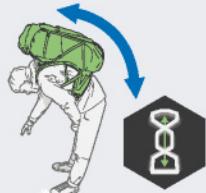
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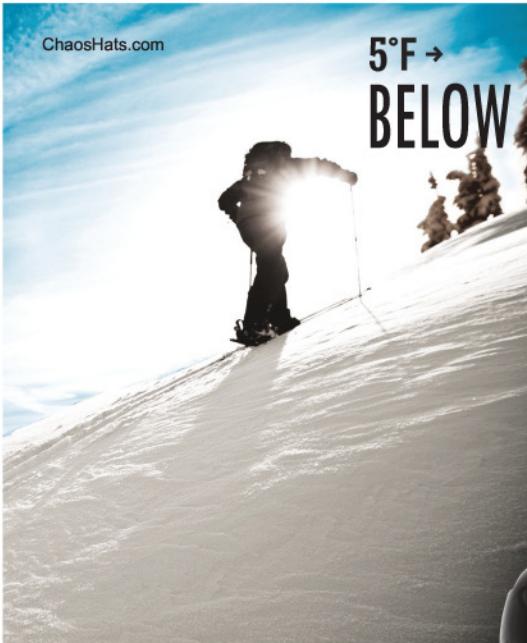
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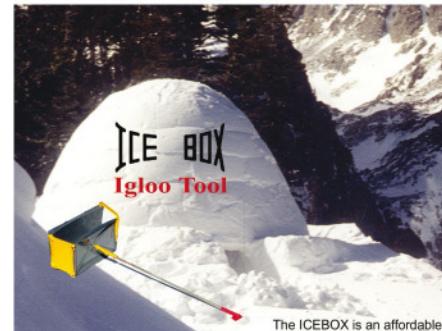
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—Casey Lyons, senior editor

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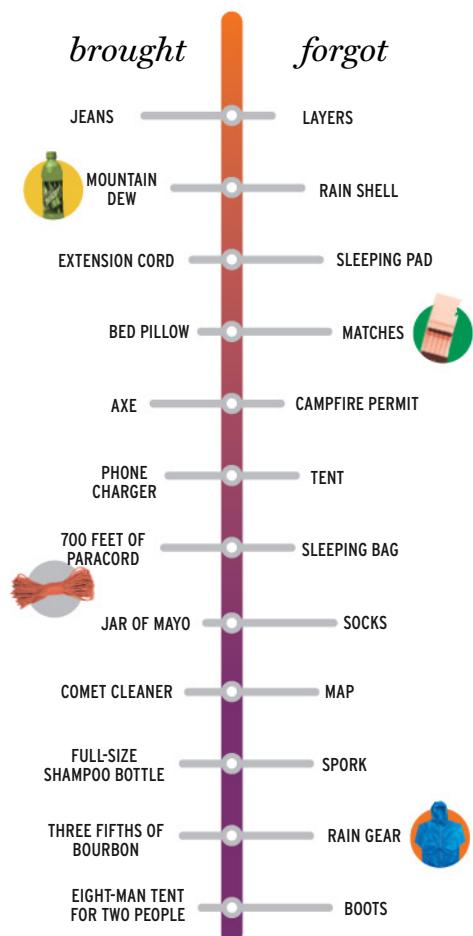
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